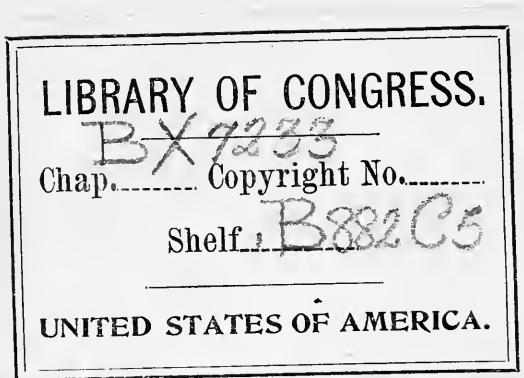


The Christ of Yesterday, To-day and Forever

EZRA HOYT BYINGTON



THE CHRIST OF YESTERDAY
TO-DAY, AND FOREVER

PAULINE H. TAYLOR

1903-1956

1903-1956

THE CHRIST OF YESTERDAY
TO-DAY, AND FOREVER

And Other Sermons

BY
EZRA HOYT BYINGTON, D.D.

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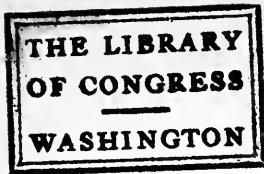
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TO

THE THREE CHURCHES WHICH IT HAS BEEN
MY PRIVILEGE TO SERVE,—

*THE OLD SOUTH CHURCH IN WINDSOR, VT.,
THE COLLEGE CHURCH IN BRUNSWICK, ME.,
AND THE FIRST CHURCH IN MONSON, MASS.,—*

These Sermons

ARE AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED BY THEIR
FRIEND AND FORMER PASTOR.

INTRODUCTION.

THESE sermons have done their work in the pulpit, and they are sent to the press in the hope that they may still be of service in a new form. It is often said that books of sermons are not read, but the fact that so many volumes of sermons are published from year to year is an indication that it is not too late for the printed sermon to be of some use in the world.

I confess that the desire to contribute something towards guiding the thought of our time to correct conclusions in respect to the methods of preaching, and in respect to its substance also, has been a leading motive in the publication of this book. The preaching of our day is different from that of the last generation, and yet the difference is not so much in the substance, as in the form. That body of truth which has come down from the Apostolic age, and which has been received by all branches of the Church, is still the bread of life for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. But we have no use for some of the theories and speculations concerning the religion which Christ taught, which originated in the middle ages, or in the time of the

Reformation. The advancement of natural science, and the progress that has been made during this century towards the mastery of nature, with the practical spirit and tendencies of the age, require new methods of presenting religious truth in the pulpit.

In the first place, the preaching for the twentieth century will need to *deepen the sense of personal freedom and responsibility*. Religion assumes the freedom of the will. If free-will be denied, there can be no such thing as duty, or the sense of responsibility. The cross of Christ is foolishness to those who do not have a sense of sin, and no one feels that he is a sinner until he realizes that the evil deeds are his own acts. The psychological problem underlies the problems of theology. Our popular literature is saturated with the spirit of fatalism. The tendency is to explain the whole life of man as the result of heredity, and environment. "Man lives," says Professor Tyndall, "in a realm of physical and moral necessity." If this be true, it follows that he is not responsible for his actions. It has been said that the extreme Calvinism of the early Puritan divines cut up by the roots the sense of responsibility. It is singular that the same result should have been secured by the scientific Agnosticism of modern times. It is the most difficult problem for the preacher of to-day to counteract this tendency. It is not enough that the laws of the land and the laws of God assume that we are responsible for our actions. The wise

preacher will appeal to the consciousness of every sane man as the conclusive evidence of the fact of responsibility. He will find a rich field for study, and for use in his public ministrations, in the teachings of the Master, in the conversations, and parables, and discourses which show, in such simple and conclusive ways, that the life of man is a life of liberty; that when he does evil it is because he loves the evil, and chooses to follow it; and that when he does well it is because he chooses to obey the voice of God speaking in the secret places of his soul, and calling him to the better way. He will find that our Lord constantly assumed the fact of human freedom, as the ground of responsibility. He said, "if any man thirst let him come unto me and drink;" and He also said, "ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." He will also find that the Master recognized the weakness and infirmity of the will, and that He was always reminding His disciples of the divine help that was within reach of their prayers, — the help of a Friend unseen, the Holy Comforter, who should abide with them forever.

At the same time, the preaching for this generation will need *to set forth the gospel*: the glad tidings of peace, and pardon, and eternal life. Never have the masses of men needed more than now the invitation of the Christ: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." It is of little real use to preach social theories, or ethical theories, or theories of religion. The multitudes that gather

about Dwight L. Moody, wherever he goes, on either side of the sea, and that used to listen to Phillips Brooks, cannot be satisfied with mere naturalism. They crave a religion that is supernatural in its origin. They want a divine Person to give authority to the message: — one who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever; — one who is able to save to the uttermost those that draw near unto God through Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. People are not drawn to religious teachers now on account of their traditional beliefs. They come because they have tried the doctrines of men, and have found the need of a religion that is above nature. They want a Teacher who can speak as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

The preaching for our times must also be adapted *to relieve the difficulties of those who are oppressed by honest doubt.* The dogmatism of the older pulpit has been met by the dogmatism of the men of science, and the beliefs of a great many people have been unsettled. It was the purpose of Christ in His preaching to lead men to realize their spiritual wants, in order that they might come to Him for the water of life. He taught that the kingdom of God is not an outward thing. The kingdom of God is within you, and among you, — that is, it is spiritual. It has for its special work to bring us into sympathy with God. No one who is without this spiritual indwelling can know of the doctrine. Those who are feeling after God, in our time, need

to be guided with sympathy, and a broad intelligence, through the mists of unbelief, until they find Him who can satisfy their wants. They need to be taught the sweet reasonableness of the gospel, as well as its divine origin, that they may magnify the love and grace of God.

EZRA HOYT BYINGTON.

FRANKLIN STREET, NEWTON, MASS.

November 1, 1897.

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I.

THE CHRIST OF YESTERDAY, TO-DAY,
AND FOREVER.

I.

THE CHRIST OF YESTERDAY, TO-DAY, AND FOREVER.

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.

HEBREWS xiii. 8.

ONE impression which we get from the course of events in this world leads us to think that everything is changing. The fashion of this world passeth away. It has no yesterday, it is so new, no to-morrow, it is so unsubstantial. It is only the fashion of to-day, and to-morrow will bring a new fashion. But the world lasts, while its fashions change. The seasons change, but time endures. The springing grass, and the leaves, and the flowers pass away, but the fields, and the hills, and the mountains do not appear to change. One who goes back to the home of his childhood is impressed by the changes which a few years have wrought. The trees that he planted in his youth have grown beyond his recognition. The old houses have given place to new ones. The old neighbors have grown old, and many of them have passed on, and a new generation has come to fill their places. The old habits, the old ideas of life, have been greatly modified. But human nature, with its great wants

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and experiences, is still the same. And the general features of the country are the same. He will range through the same meadows, climb the same hill-sides, follow the same streams, look up to the same mountains.

So we find the permanent over against the changing. If we find some things that are only for to-day, we find other things that are the same yesterday and to-day, and they are likely to be the same in the years and generations to come. History presents to us scenes that are constantly shifting, but it shows us principles that grow more familiar with the progress of time. The fashions of dress and of social life, the tools, and even the employments of men change with the advance of civilization, but the great facts of human life, and the staple wants of human beings do not change. Hunger and thirst are evermore the same; love and hope, fear and pain, sickness and death are the same. We look up to the same constellations in the evening sky that Moses saw, and Abraham, and Noah; our days and months and years are the same. Yet there is constant progress. Many of the arts that were important a few centuries ago are lost arts to us, because we have passed beyond the need of them. What could an old Greek of the age of Themistocles do in a modern city, which is without walls for its defence, which is lighted by gas or by electricity, which receives its news by telegraph and telephone, whose citizens travel on railways and in steamships? But, after all, he would find that the eager, bustling people of these later times need essentially the same things to make

their lives comfortable and desirable that his Athenian neighbors needed so long ago; that the old ideas of truth and justice, and of the rights of man, and the old laws of self-denial and economy and industry, and the old liabilities to disease and infirmity and death have not changed at all in twenty centuries.

The question is a fair one, *How far is the religion of Christ permanent, and how far is it subject to change?* It has had a long yesterday, eighteen hundred years and more. Is it the same to-day? Is it likely to be the same in the long to-morrow that it was in the beginning? Has it such elements of permanence that we may reasonably expect it to be the religion of the future? These are living questions for us at this time when things move so rapidly, and when the theory of evolution is changing so many of the old beliefs and leading to so many new conclusions, and when the great religions of the East are studied so appreciatively. How far is the religion of Christ to be modified by a process of evolution? Does the progress which the world is making in our time touch the truths which are most surely believed among Christians?

I.

Let us begin with Christ Himself, who said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."¹ It is eighteen centuries since He lived on the earth,

¹ St. John xii. 32.

and that is more than half the period covered by authentic history. Very little that belonged to that time influences the world now, and why should His words ? He was a peasant of Galilee,—a wandering preacher, who selected unlearned and ignorant men as His disciples, and who was despised and condemned by the scribes and doctors of the law. Herod and Pontius Pilate would have scorned to exchange places with this poor and homeless man. But what is Herod or Pilate to us? What is Jerusalem with its temple,—except as connected with this Teacher, who sometimes came there at the risk of His life to teach His doctrines to the people? What is Rome to us, with its imperial law and its civilization, the pride of its life, and its splendid worship? What is Augustus, the foremost man in all the world when Jesus was born; whom men adored as a god after he was dead? What but the most brilliant representative of the fashion of the world which passeth away? It would not have seemed possible to one who stood in the Roman Forum in the first Christian century, in view of the magnificent temples and palaces of the eternal city, for that civilization to pass away, and another civilization so different and so superior to follow it. But the very languages of that old world are dead, and it lives chiefly in the dust of its tombs, and the ruins of its monuments, and in the ideas of those thinkers who were so far in advance of the popular notions of their time.

The question is a fair one, *Why should we go back to that age, to the life and the words of Jesus for our religion?*

We shall get the answer if we study the life and the teachings of Jesus, the Christ. Those who work with perishable materials must expect their works to perish. Those who make the fashion-plates, for example, have to do with that which "passeth away." If Jesus had been simply a man of his time, if He had been only a Jew, if He had given His life to the questions just then awakening attention, He would have been nothing to the world now. But see how large and free His life was. He was born a Jew, but He refused to limit Himself by any Jewish prejudices. He taught that men should worship, not in Jerusalem only, but wherever they could find a place for prayer; and He commanded His disciples to preach the gospel to every creature. If any one tried to limit Him by the narrow ideas of that time, He met them by an appeal to universal truths, to principles that are broad enough for all times and all men.

His ideas were not those of the men of his time. They depended on power; Jesus depended on love. They appealed to the past,—to its precedents and traditions; He appealed to the truth,—to principles that are universal. They despised the masses of mankind; Jesus preached to the common people, and sought to lead them to receive the best things God had to give. They condemned and despised the sinful; Jesus invited the outcasts to a better life, and gave them the hope of a great redemption. Such ideas can never become obsolete. They are still in advance of the practice of mankind.

If the character of Jesus had been full of defects, He might possibly have won the favor of the people

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of Galilee and of Judea. They would have liked Him the better for His conformity to their standards. But other men, in times of higher ideals, would not have been deceived. If His character was a perfect one, it will commend itself more and more. For we all have the idea of the perfect. There is a perfection of form, which we call beautiful. There is a perfection of character, which we attribute to God Himself. Among the remains of Grecian art there are some forms so exquisitely moulded that they have been recognized by the ages as models of perfection; for the ideal standard is the same for cultivated men in all times. We have not improved upon Grecian art in respect to beauty of form. The masterpieces of ancient art are prized as highly now as they were twenty-two centuries ago, so that men are going from all lands to study those forms which were carved by Phidias and his brother artists. There has been no evolution in modern times in respect to the standard of the beautiful. But if those perfect forms appeal to the hearts of men in all ages, how much more must a perfect character, shown in the life of a perfect Man, who is our Friend and Brother. Progress can never carry us beyond perfect truth, and perfect justice, and perfect love, combined in the life of a perfect man.

What excellent quality of manhood is there that did not appear in His life? Is it *courage*? See Him meeting with the spirit of earnest conviction the spirit and tendencies of His age,— showing the hollowness of the lives of men, uncovering the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders, at the risk of popularity, of influence, and of safety. Count Tolstoi is wrong when he tells

us that Christ taught only the doctrine of non-resistance. He taught that we should turn the other cheek when we suffer a personal wrong; but He also taught us to resist evil, when He drove the money-changers from the temple with a scourge of small cords, and when He denounced the false teachers of His time as a generation of vipers.

Is it *fidelity to a high principle* which marks the true man? In other reformers we find at some times a lowering of the standard, a compromising in view of unfavorable circumstances, but never in Christ. When all men were going after Him, He showed no elation. When His peaceful methods were failing to win the nation, and the popular voice demanded that He assume authority and employ force,—when the people desired to make Him a King,—He refused to follow their wishes. When threatened, He was never disturbed; when persecuted He never complained. There is not a weak, unmanly word in all the records of His life. He wept indeed, but always for others, never for Himself. The nearer He came to the cross, the more serene His bearing became. “In all the world’s annals,” says Mr. Thomas Hughes, “there is nothing that approaches, in the sublimity of its courage, that last conversation between Christ and Pilate.”¹ The prisoner, bleeding from the scourging, His head wounded by the crown of thorns, is yet calm, self-possessed, assuming the sublimest claims, and filling even the Roman governor with an indescribable awe. That artist is quite right who has represented Christ before Pilate — in the dignity of conscious innocence,

¹ The Manliness of Christ.

waiting for the sentence to the cross, the appointed means of His victory — looking down, as a superior being, upon the man who was pronouncing His doom.

Or do you connect with the manly spirit *tenderness and delicacy of feeling*, a sensibility to the beauties of nature, deference to woman, love for little children, ready sympathy with suffering and bereavement, a thoughtful and sustained devotion to the relief of the wretched and the salvation of the lost? All these are the plain characteristics of the man Christ Jesus. And yet so admirably are they set over against each other that you cannot tell which predominates in the assemblage of excellences,— the courage of His convictions, fidelity to the truth and to God, or a delicate courtesy, a warm and tender sympathy. You cannot tell whether it was more characteristic for Christ to drive the money-changers from the temple; or to claim equality with the Father when the mob were ready to stone Him for blasphemy; or to take little children in His arms and bless them; or to weep over the ruin of Jerusalem; or to pray for the forgiveness of His murderers; or to open the gates of paradise to the penitent thief; or to commend His mother with His dying words to the disciple whom He loved.

The *completeness of the character of Jesus* is altogether unique. You cannot say that He lacked any quality of excellence. The good men of the world have belonged to certain well-marked types. John the Baptist, for example, was compared with Him; but John represented a hard and legal piety. He

came neither eating nor drinking, dwelling in the deserts, his food locusts and wild honey. But Jesus loved the cheerful ways of men. He was quite as much at home at the marriage in Cana of Galilee as at the tomb of Lazarus, weeping with the bereaved family. The Pharisees had their type of religious character, and the Sadducees had theirs; but He could not be classed with either of them. In the later centuries Christian devotees retired to the wilderness, thinking to gain holiness by solitary vigils and penances; and still later the monasteries gathered great companies of men who had renounced the world to escape its temptations. The Puritans of England and New England illustrated in their lives the virtue of fidelity to truth and duty. But our Lord was not a hermit, or a monk, or a Puritan. The various denominations of Protestant Christians represent different types of Christian character,—from the zeal and fervor of the Methodists, the conservative reverence of the Episcopalian, the freedom and faith of the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians, to the conscientious obedience of the Baptists. But no one ever thinks of Jesus as a Methodist, or a Baptist, or an Episcopalian, or a Congregationalist. His life was not moulded according to any fashion, or limited by any partial views of truth. He knew the truth from its central source. Every excellent quality which we find apart in others, we find combined in Him. There was "no fault at all in Him." He is the perfect Model, the Light of the World, and the Saviour of mankind,—the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.

II.

If we pass from Christ as an historic Person,—the divine Founder of the Christian religion, *to consider His teachings*, we still meet the question whether the religion of Christ is entitled to a permanent place as the religion of the world. Other religions have been outgrown in the progress of mankind. Why should not men outgrow the Christian religion? Is there any reason why we should consider this as the absolute religion? We shall find in the history of our religion striking illustrations of the fact that whatever is narrow and limited and imperfect will pass away as men advance, while that which embodies truths that are universal will endure.

The forms of worship, for example, are liable to change. The primitive Christians, accustomed to the most simple services of prayer and praise, in private rooms, or in the catacombs, or in the deserts, would hardly recognize as fellow disciples those who in magnificent churches and cathedrals worship the same Lord. The organization of the Church has varied in different ages and countries. The tendency on the whole, in later times, is towards simplicity in worship and in organization. The vestments of the clergy, the style of church music, the form of church edifices, all these are among the variable elements in the Church. There has been progress in the knowledge and the statement of the *doctrines of our religion*. The first Christians had not by any means a complete system of religious truth. The Apostles'

Creed is far less complete than the Nicene or the Athanasian creeds; and these are very far behind the Creeds of the Reformers. The Westminster Confession was in advance of any of the earlier confessions, and yet there are very few well-informed Christians who are not now in advance of some parts of the Westminster Confession. The Reformers had learned more about justification by faith than the early Christians knew; and modern Christians know more about the love of God, and the freeness of the gospel than the Puritans knew. More light has been breaking from the Word of God. The great movements in modern missions have enlarged the views of Christians in respect to the purpose of the Incarnation. The decay of systems of absolutism, and the progress of political and religious liberty have prepared men to understand the teachings of our Lord. The progress of Christian thought, or, in the phrase of the day, *the evolution of religion*, has given to the Church a more adequate conception of the Fatherhood of God, and of the extent of His redemptive purposes.

The question is a fair one, *How far are these changes in religious opinion likely to extend?* Are the foundations of our faith in danger? Will the religion of the future be Christian?

The true answer to this question, which so many are asking, is this: these changes do not touch the essential truths of the Christian faith. *The deepest wants of men are the same in every age*, and these deepest wants are met by the religion of Jesus the Christ. There are certain facts in the life of man which are not changed at all by the progress of mod-

ern thought. Life is short. Death is certain. We are weak, and dependent, and prone to evil. As all men need food that they may live, so all men need the favor and love of God. As all must die, so all must render account to God for the deeds done in the body. The sense of responsibility rests upon all men,—whether pagans or Christians, and this has always been the great burden of humanity. The Hindoo asks how to get rid of his burden of sin, just as all men in all ages have asked. The deepest truth in the Christian religion is this: that Christ came into the world *to save sinners*, to save *those who were lost*. He taught in the most impressive moment of His life that His blood was "*shed for many for the remission of sins.*"¹ He brings "*life and immortality to light,*" and holds out to men the offer of eternal life in the kingdom of God. He brings this infinite gift within reach of every man on this earth. These truths of the Christian faith were the sources of its power when Paul preached all the way from Antioch to Rome; and they stand to-day, like the sun in the sky, the sources of light and of life to the world. So long as man is man, he will need just that which our Saviour offers in the gospel. The progress of mankind in the arts of life and in philosophy cannot possibly carry them beyond the need of peace with God, through the forgiveness of sins.

¹ For myself, I believe that Paul's message to the Corinthians,—Jesus Christ and Him crucified,—is the highest that has ever come to man, and the personal form which the divine idea assumed in the apostolic announcement appears to me essential to the reality and permanence of the idea itself.—DR. GEORGE A. GORDON, in *The Christ of To-day*, p. 256.

III.

But there is yet higher ground for us to take. *Religion is more than a theory or a system of doctrine.* It is, first of all, a *personal experience.* It does not depend upon books of evidences. What the religion of Christ really is, is known to every one who knows the love of God and the "joy of salvation." If it were possible for the progress of modern criticism to destroy even the Bible, — the record of God's revelation, — religion would remain in the hearts of true disciples as a living experience; just as an experience of love and sympathy and friendship would remain after the books that tell about them had perished. Religion does not depend upon a book. Father Taylor, the chaplain at the Seamen's Bethel, used to say: "I do not want anybody to prove to me that there is a God, for I have been well acquainted with Him for a great many years." That is the vital fact in regard to personal religion. Every Christian is in communion and fellowship with God, and knows him as truly as he knows his own kindred.¹

If, then, you meet an unbeliever, ask him to follow the history of a disciple of Christ. Begin at the time when the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, begins to fill his soul, — the moment when he makes his first real prayer, and the clouds which till then had separated him from God are scattered, and the first direct answer comes back, and he

¹ See *The Evidence of Christian Experience*, Prof. L. F. Stearns, p. 138; also p. 423, note 19.

knows that heaven is opened, and that messages are going to God and returning from Him, as the angels went and came on the ladder that Jacob saw. He has the Spirit witnessing with his own spirit that he is born of God. He has the assurance of the forgiveness of sin, and of peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.¹ This personal experience is the deepest fact in the Christian consciousness.

A few years pass, and that young disciple is drawing towards the end of his life. You will hardly recognize in the venerable old man the youth who so long ago became a disciple of the Christ. The fashion of the world has gone by with him. The fancies and dreams of his youth have departed. The friends of his youth have gone. All the old life has gone. But the great hope has become more precious as he has come nearer the land of Beulah and the celestial city. He has walked with God so long that he desires to depart, that he may be with Him. We have all seen such Christians die, and when all other interests and thoughts had been dropped, in their progress towards heaven, the love of Christ has drawn them forward more and more strongly,—a love more enduring than life, the same when flesh and heart were failing, and the glories of the spiritual world were lighting up the path of the departing saint.

This personal experience is the essential fact in Christianity. The ethnic religions have nothing to correspond with it. It was to prepare the way for this experience that the Son of God came into the

¹ St. John ix. 25; Romans viii. 16.

world, that those who "labor and are heavy laden" might come unto Him and find "rest for their souls," and that, as He said, He might give unto them "eternal life." It was to secure this religious experience that the Holy Spirit came to enter into the work of redemption. For this same end the Bible was given. For this the Church of God exists, with its ministry and all its means of grace. Every missionary enterprise, every missionary station has this for its final purpose.

So long as there are living Christians in the world, the evidence of the truth and reality of the Christian religion will continue. This experience varies a little as the circumstances of Christians vary, but in all essential respects it has been the same, whether in the time of St. Paul or of Augustine, of Luther or of Wesley, of the first disciples or of those of our own time.

This experience has all the marks of a divine work. It is uniform, it is permanent, it is controlling. It is the evidence to us that God is now present in His own world,—an *immanent God*, fulfilling His promises, and enlarging His kingdom. The convincing answer to the unbelief of our time is the living Church, vital in every part, holding forth the word of life, and attested by the presence of the Holy Spirit. So long as the vital spiritual work of Christ goes forward, nothing can hinder its conquests.

May we not expect that this work in human souls will continue in the long to-morrow? It has back of it the purposes of God from the foundation of the world. It has back of it the character of Jesus Christ

and His wonderful words. The Holy Spirit of God gives it vital force. Inasmuch as the Lord has begun this work of Redemption, will He not continue it until He shall have filled heaven with redeemed souls, who shall ascribe honor and glory unto the Lamb that was slain, and is alive forevermore?

II.

THE FUTURE OF THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST.

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THE FUTURE OF THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST.

The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you. ST. LUKE xvii. 20, 21.

MOST of the words of Christ referred directly to events which belonged to his own time. He spoke with reference to the sins which were then common, and to the tendencies which were then strong. But the divine wisdom of His words appears in this, that the things which were spoken to the men of His own age are found to be suited to the necessities of men of all ages; so that this Teacher of the common people of Galilee is also the Teacher of the wise men of Europe and America. His words, indeed, have profounder meanings for us than they could have had for the Scribes and Pharisees.

Take these words concerning the kingdom of God. The Jews had much to say about that kingdom, but they did not comprehend it. They always spoke of it as something outward, something which came "with observation." They fancied that the kingdom of God was of necessity connected with Jerusalem and Judea; and they looked for a Redeemer

who should restore the kingdom to Israel.¹ It was, in their view, a political kingdom, and they were looking in this direction and in that for some means of breaking the Roman yoke. In their religious observances they laid an undue stress upon outward rites and ceremonies. The Saviour was always directing their thoughts from these outward things to the things that are spiritual,—to the spiritual meaning of religious rites, and the spiritual nature of the true kingdom. “God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth.” “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation,” for it is set up within you, and the “pure in heart” are the ones that “shall see God.”

These words from the old gospel *may guide us to a correct view of the kingdom of Christ, in its relation to some of the current discussions of this Age of Doubt.*

The intellectual struggle which is now going on concerning the very basis of the Faith,—concerning the apostolic teaching which has come down from the first century,—is perhaps the greatest the world has ever seen, and it is destined to become more serious at no distant time, and perhaps to deal with questions in a more profound way. Already, in the words of a recent writer, “men are calmly questioning and preparing to cast aside beliefs which were once accepted as the very basis of religion. Doctrines are swinging before us in the balance that seemed but yesterday to be fixed as mountains.”² Young men are watching the progress of scientific discovery, saying, “Lo here!”

¹ Philochristus, p. 29.

² Questions of Belief, W. H. Mallock, p. 281.

or "Lo there!" as though the kingdom of God came by *observations*, whether through the microscope, or through the finest chemical analysis, or combinations, or the most careful examinations of life. Questions relating to the divine authority of the Bible are more and more prominent. Strauss, in his old age, published "The Old and the New Faith," assuming that the world had outgrown the old, and that it was already seeking for the new; and he succeeded at least in showing that, for himself, with his active yet darkened mind, there was no such thing as faith. Indeed, the question of the New Testament, "When the Son of man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?"¹ is a question which is as pertinent now as it was eighteen centuries ago.

It is important to come to such questions with open minds. We must guard against the fallacies that lurk in so much of human reasoning. We should seek to gain broad and comprehensive views of truth. One cannot expect to see all the stars of heaven so long as he dwells in a cave. The truth has more to fear from a narrow and superficial scholarship than from anything else. No one can hope to reach firm standing-ground until he has studied these questions widely, and studied them long.

I.

We shall do well to approach the discussion through the history of religious thought. Any one who is versed in the history of opinions must be aware

¹ St. Luke xviii. 8.

that the law of action and reaction has always been illustrated in religious progress. It is no new thing for the current to set strongly towards unbelief. There have been a number of periods in Christian history when it has seemed as though the world was drifting away from a belief in the supernatural. Every such period has been followed by a reaction which has given religious truth a stronger hold upon the world. The growth of the kingdom has never been uniform. The tide ebbs and flows. The pendulum swings backwards and forwards. It would not follow that the Christian religion was really losing its hold, even if the great mass of educated men were to become unbelievers. One of the benefits of the historic spirit is the power it gives one to appreciate these currents and counter currents of religious opinion.

All through the historical books of the Old Testament we find that the people of Israel were vacillating between the worship of the true God and that of the gods of the heathen. The reason was that the religion of their fathers was really above their spiritual level. It required an effort to raise them at any time high enough so that they could enter with any heartiness into its spiritual cultus. There was always a tendency to drop towards a lower plane. There was no such alternation among the people who dwelt around them, because their religious systems did not require any such elevation of the moral and spiritual tone.

Among Christian nations there has been a similar alternation between faith and unbelief, and for the same reason. We can select illustrations of this

statement from any one of the Christian centuries. Let us take, for example, the religious history of England since the Reformation. Never was there a greater change in the moral and religious state of a nation than that in England between the early years of Elizabeth and the time of Oliver Cromwell. The Bible became the book of the people, and its truths the most common objects of thought. The best literature of the period was represented by Hooker, and Bacon, and Bunyan, and Spenser, and Milton, and it was saturated with religious ideas. The Puritan spirit gave a serious and religious tone to society as well as to literature. Even the government of the State was regarded as subsidiary to the progress of the kingdom of God. Some of the old forms of worship were discarded, that men might pay their devotions in ways that were more simple and sincere. The Lord's Day was rescued from desecration, and was kept all over England as a holy day.¹ The Puritan movement was a whole century in gathering strength, and one would have supposed that its strong currents would have continued to flow. But the religious tone of Puritanism was too high to be maintained at that period, and it was followed by a great reaction on the restoration of the Stuarts. Says Mr. Greene, "When Charles came to Whitehall the whole face of England was changed." "All that was noblest and best in Puritanism was whirled away." "Godliness became a byword of scorn." "The young men drank in the spirit of scepticism and free inquiry. From the spiritual problems which engrossed attention in the

¹ Lecky, *Democracy and Liberty*, vol. ii. p. 102.

times of the Puritans, England turned to the study of nature, so that the pursuit of physical science became a passion.”¹ The first national observatory arose at Greenwich. Sir Isaac Newton gave a fresh impulse to the pursuit of natural science by his great discoveries. The young scholars of the nation were devoted to these studies. Useful inventions and the conveniences of life were greatly multiplied.

With this devotion to nature came in the philosophy of Hume, which has ever been the method of unbelief, and the sceptical system of Hobbes. Later still the historian says that religion sunk to a lower point. “In the higher circles every one laughs if one talks of religion.” “Of the prominent statesmen of the time the greater part were unbelievers in any form of Christianity, and distinguished for the grossness and immorality of their lives.” “We saw but one Bible in the parish of Cheddar,” said Hannah More, “and that was used to prop a flower pot.”² Vice and crime existed everywhere, in high circles and in low. The Church, if we may credit the representations of Mr. Macaulay, had lost its power for good. Nine-tenths of the clergy had sunk into the station of menial servants in the aristocratic houses where they officiated as chaplains. “Sometimes,” says a recent writer, “the reverend man nailed up the apricots, and sometimes he curried the coach horses, and sometimes he was even compelled to resort to the feeding of swine that he might obtain his daily bread.”³

¹ Short History of England, pp. 587-600.

² Ibid., p. 707.

³ Quoted by Prof. Austin Phelps, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1857, p. 290.

In the earlier part of the eighteenth century in England the power of religion was very small. Addison declared that there was "less appearance of religion in England than in any neighboring State or kingdom." Bishop Butler said that "many persons took it for granted that Christianity was now at length discovered to be fictitious." Lady Montagu wrote that "more atheists were to be found among the fine ladies of the time than among the lower sort of rakes."¹

For a long period the masses of the English people turned away from the churches. The Puritan Lord's-Day was exchanged for the Sunday of the continent. Romanism was secretly fostered at the court, and it seemed as though England was destined to pass again under the power of the Church of Rome. But in due time there came a reaction which has carried the influence of Christianity much higher than in the best periods before. This reaction seemed to begin with the labors of the Wesleys, and of Whitefield, a hundred and fifty years ago. It extended to all branches of the church, and to all departments of religious activity. It effectually limited the influence of unbelief, and brought back the great mass of Englishmen to Christianity. This movement developed into the great revivals of religion which have swept over England and America so many times. Out of it has grown the system of Sunday-schools, the extension of popular education, the great philanthropic enterprises of the time, especially the anti-

¹ Lecky, *England in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. i., pp. 516-519; Sidney's *England in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. ii., pp. 323, 324; *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1897, pp. 68-70.

slavery movement, the temperance reform, the Bible and Tract societies, the Home and Foreign Missionary societies, and the spirit of Christian union. Among the indirect results of this reaction have been the rise of a spiritual philosophy, the philosophy of intuitions in place of the sensational philosophy of Locke; and the rise of a moral science founded upon immutable right in place of the selfish system; the cultivation of a higher style of poetry, under the influence of Wordsworth and Coleridge;¹ and, in politics, the extension of free institutions, the protection of the rights of the masses of the people, and the enfranchisement of woman. The Victorian period has seen the finest growth of the religion of Christ.

It is not surprising that this great reaction has been succeeded by another in the opposite direction. The extension of commerce, and the great increase of wealth; the amazing progress of the natural sciences; the improvements in the practical arts; the progress of political freedom, — all these have had a tendency to turn the attention of men from that which is spiritual to that which is material: from the inward to the outward; from metaphysics to physics; from theology to chemistry and biology; from the word of God to the philosophies of men; from the kingdom of God to the kingdom of man. It is inevitable that in such an age there should be some weakening of the power of the supernatural.

The *history of the religious life in New England* is also full of illustrations of the same tendencies. In the earlier Puritan age the religious spirit of the

¹ Shairp, Poetry and Philosophy, p. 2.

colonists was a high one. They had been sifted out from the mass of their countrymen by a long course of persecution. They were men of eminent piety. Religious ideas and religious motives guided their plans of life. But in the next generation there was a change. "A little after 1660," says Thomas Prince, "there began to appear a decay; and this increased to 1670, when it grew very visible and threatening, and was generally complained of by the pious people among them. This tendency was much stronger in 1680, when but few of the first generation remained." Revivals of religion were few. The standard of morality was low. There were great changes in theological opinion. The Lord's Day was commonly desecrated. The line between the Church and the world was almost obliterated.¹ This declension continued up to the Great Awakening, in the time of President Edwards, who bears testimony to the changes in the religious spirit of the people and to the low standard of morality among them. And yet, we are told, everybody at that time was expecting to go to heaven at last, whatever his life might be. The Great Awakening began a religious movement which was felt for many years. But towards the close of the eighteenth century there was another period of religious decline. The great revivals of the first third of the present century raised the churches to a higher plane of religious activity than they had ever known before. But it led also to a separation from the old Puritan churches of a large number of people who

¹ The Puritan in England and New England, p. 327; The Religious Life in New England, Dr. G. L. Walker.

had lost their faith in the Divinity of Our Lord, and in some other doctrines of the Evangelical churches.¹

So there have been these oscillations of the pendulum. But the point I insist upon is this: these changes have been temporary, and self-limited. There are strong reasons for the opinion that they cannot permanently weaken the hold of religion upon men. On the whole, the kingdom of Christ has extended its influence in each of the centuries of its history.

II.

Passing from this historical view of the changes which have accompanied religious progress in the world, it is important to notice the fact that the *religion of Christ does not depend upon science, or speculations, or upon the state of opinion among men, for its basis or for its growth.* “Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for behold the kingdom of God is within you.” The basis of religion is in the constitution of the human soul. God made man “in His image and after His likeness,” made him for communion and fellowship with Himself; and this communion and fellowship with God is the one great object of the Christian revelation. It is to know God; to “acquaint ourselves with Him and be at peace;” “to abide in Him.” “This is life eternal,” said our Lord, “that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast

¹ Some Aspects of the Religious Life of New England, by Dr. G. L. Walker, lectures iii., iv., v.

sent."¹ Religion is possible for man because he has religious faculties, just as knowledge is possible for man because he has intellectual faculties, just as the cultivation of taste is possible because he has the sense of the beautiful. Religion grows out of a sense of dependence and of obligation. Its final object is to bring us to God. When man is in connection with God he will be like Him; that is, he will be pure and holy.

God has provided for this in the constitution of our moral nature. He has not left Himself without a witness. He has written His law upon our hearts. We know in our own consciousness that we are free and that we are responsible. We do not learn of God from others. As we know ourselves as personal and responsible, so we know God as the First Cause,—the Being to whom we are responsible. With such a moral and religious nature, man has a foundation for religion. This is the reason why men of different tribes, and different stages of culture have had some form of worship. This is the reason why we have no instance in history of a nation that has given up religion. Sometimes a nation has changed its gods (though not often), just as sometimes a nation has changed its style of dress, and its food, and its government, its laws, its music, and its language. But a nation does not give up all food, or music, or language, or government, or law; because men are so made that they need these things. For the same reason a nation does not give up religion.

¹ St. John xvii. 3.

Let me suggest, further, that as each one of the natural senses has its own specific object, so each part of our intellectual and spiritual being has its own specific object. We do not judge of a painting by the sense of smell. We do not judge of music by sight. A man who has always been blind cannot form a conception of color. And so it is that each part of our complex being takes cognizance of its own specific objects. Now, the religious faculty has its own specific objects, just as the other faculties have theirs. A man cannot judge of religion by the sense of touch or of smell. He cannot judge of religion by his æsthetic nature. For religion is not a matter of taste. He cannot judge of religion by any of the processes or results of natural science, for religion does not belong to the natural world, but to the supernatural. The kingdom of God is not in protoplasm. The kingdom of God is not in that deep-sea ooze to which Prof. Huxley gave the name of *Bathybius*. The kingdom of God is not in the crucible of the chemist. Nobody need expect to find God among the ashes, or to distil His essence from the gases. The claims of religion cannot be affected by the decision of the questions concerning the origin of species. The doctrine of development has nothing to do with the doctrine of human responsibility or of immortality,—with the doctrine of prayer, or of the forgiveness of sin.

It is also true that God is present in the world to secure the development of the religious nature which He has given to man. He has given a revelation of so much truth as we need to know. He is sending

His Spirit to convince us of our need of Him, and to guide us in the way to eternal life.

III.

If these positions be admitted, it follows that *the progress of natural science cannot affect the foundations of spiritual religion, because natural science does not have anything to do with those foundations.* How is it possible, for example, that the science of nature should prove that there is no God? For, first, that would be proving a negative, which is always difficult. Then, the purpose of science is to investigate nature, not the Author of nature. Suppose it should be proved that all natural processes are governed by stable and definite laws. Very well; is not God the Author of those laws? Are not those laws simply the ways in which the Almighty exerts His power? Suppose it should be proved that all the various kinds of life, vegetable and animal, have been derived from a few original types, or that all these types should be reduced to one, would not the question still remain, how came that one life to exist? Whence had it that mysterious power wrapped up within itself, which could develop into all those myriad forms of life? And that is a question which science cannot answer. Science, at the utmost, can only remove the question of a Creator a little further back. It is a more wonderful thing to create that germ which had within itself "the promise and potency of all life," that first life from which, in the progress of ages, may have

come beasts and birds, and creeping things, and man himself, than to have made these "each after his kind." Suppose that all the stars of heaven have been evolved from the star dust,—who made the star dust? who gave to it its wonderful properties? whose power set it in motion, and secured its evolution? Can science tell?

Take the question, which some one has stated recently, "whether we are our bodies;" whether that which we mean when we say "ourselves" is anything more than the body of flesh and blood; the question, indeed, whether man has a spiritual and an immortal part. Science can show that the mind is affected by the body. An English writer states the facts in this striking way: "Body and mind have visible relations to each other. There is organic unity in the whole man. Touch the smallest fibre of the corporeal man, and in some infinitesimal way we may trace the effect up into the higher pinnacles of spiritual life. Man is one, however compound. Fire his conscience and he blushes. Check his circulation and he thinks wildly, or thinks not at all. Impair his secretions and moral sense is dulled, his aspirations flag, his hope, love, and faith reel. Impair them still more and he becomes a brute. A cup of drink degrades his moral nature below that of a swine. A lancet will restore him from delirium to clear thought. Excess of thought will waste his muscles. An emotion will double the strength of his muscles. And at last the prick of a needle, or a grain of mineral will, in an instant, lay to rest forever his body and its unity, and all the spontaneous activities of intelligence, feeling,

and action with which that compound organism was charged.”¹

So far science can go, because science has the instruments that are needful to investigate the processes. But it cannot go beyond this and tell us that man is simply an organism, that it is the body that thinks and feels and wills, that “imagination is simply the vibration of a particular fibre,” that love and joy and hope are simply the results of physiological changes. Science has no instruments by which to gain a knowledge of these deeper things. Nor can science show us that our longings for immortality are delusive, or that the sense of responsibility is idle; that our longings after God, even the living God, that the earnestness of prayer, the raptures of devotion, the faith of the Christian, are all vain.

Natural science can never, by searching, find out God. It has no instrument by which to take the dimensions of a soul. It cannot weigh a thought, or analyze an affection. It cannot tell us why music pleases us, why falsehood excites our reprobation, why virtue wins our approval, or why we turn towards the Power above when flesh and heart are failing us. It is one of the best results of investigation to recognize the limitations of our faculties. Up to those limitations we can go, with a prospect of gaining real knowledge; but it is idle for finite man to try to go beyond the limits of his own reason and understanding.

¹ The Soul and the Future Life, in “The Nineteenth Century,” June, 1877.

IV.

We should add to this consideration the fact that *the positive evidence which supports our belief in the supernatural is such as ought to carry us over all the difficulties which can arise in science or philosophy.*

For that evidence has its own independent basis. It comes from our moral being, and no evidence from natural science or speculation can touch that. We know of colors by sight; we know of sounds by hearing; we judge of the beautiful by our æsthetic nature. So we judge of that which is spiritual by our moral and religious nature.

God has not left us to find out spiritual truth by reasoning, any more than He has left us to find out our food by chemical analysis. Our natural instincts teach us to eat, and a deeper spiritual instinct teaches us to turn towards the Power above us. The reality of religion never can depend upon long and intricate argument. For then nobody could gain a knowledge of that which is religious until he was able to argue. But the kingdom of Christ is for little children,—for the wayfaring man. It is not a philosophy. The little child sees the beauty of a flower, and is delighted with it. So that same child sees that it ought to do what is right, and feels that it ought not to do wrong, and that it deserves to be blamed when it has done wrong. And when you tell the child that God is good, and that He would have all of us do right, its mind is already prepared for the truth. The idea of God only waits to be developed. As the mind enlarges, these ideas of God and of duty

and of responsibility develop more and more. It is these ideas which have to do with the kingdom of our Lord. And children are nearer to God than the rest of us, because these moral ideas are with them so fresh and so controlling.

These moral and religious ideas have had more to do with the history of the human mind than all other ideas. Are not the oldest monuments connected with religion? Is not the oldest poetry full of religious ideas? Are not the three greatest epic poems the world possesses pervaded by a sense of the supernatural? Take the great dramas of Sophocles, of Shakespeare, and of Goethe,—are they not full of the deepest moral elements? In *Macbeth*, as one has recently said, “the main thing is not that Duncan the murdered king is dead, but that *Macbeth* the murderer lives; not that Duncan sleeps, but that *Macbeth* can sleep no more.”¹ So “it is conscience that doth make cowards of us all.” So it is that “the dread of something after death puzzles the will,” and holds us back from the evil we desire to do. Remorse poisons all the sources of pleasure. The desire for the favor of God leads men everywhere to send up their prayers to heaven, and offer their gifts and sacrifices upon the altars. The very deepest experiences of human life grow out of the sense of spiritual relations, and the longings for spiritual perfection.

Can we suppose that all this is a delusion? Can we believe that these deepest thoughts, these highest aspirations, these purest affections are vain?

¹ *Questions of Belief*, p. 341.

Say, rather, that the things you see and handle are illusions; that the voices you hear come from nowhere; that the things you taste are non-existent; that there are no such things as beautiful forms and sweet sounds; that all knowledge is delusive and vain. Say this, say anything rather than that these deep thoughts and feelings and experiences, these longings for immortality, these prayers returning with blessings to our souls, these hours of communion with God are delusions. Be it that we are mocked and befooled by the sight of our eyes, and the hearing of our ears, and by all the action of our intellects; but let it not be that these highest, holiest, divinest movements of spiritual life are only mocking and deceiving us.

It is very true there are perplexities concerning these spiritual truths. It is easy for ingenious reasoners to exaggerate these difficulties. It is not necessary for us to be able to clear them all away. A child can raise questions which a philosopher cannot solve. A skilful rhetorician can easily place these difficulties in a very striking light. "Words," says old Homer, "make this way and that way,—great is the power of words;" but these moral instincts which are born with us, these religious ideas which are always making themselves felt, whether we will or not, are the most permanent of facts. Many a humble Christian, who cannot begin to reply to the objections of scientific unbelief, furnishes in his own life an evidence of the reality of spiritual religion which these objectors cannot gainsay.

“The kingdom of God is among you.” Religion is of the heart. It is the communion of a devout mind with God. It is thus its own evidence. “We speak that we know, and testify that we have seen.” It is an experience. Even if the Bible could be discredited and destroyed, the grounds of religion would remain. They existed before there was any Bible. As long as men can come into communication with God, in a direct and personal way, with their weakness and their sin, religion will exist.

The strength and permanence of the kingdom of Christ depend upon this: that the Bible interprets these deepest moral feelings of ours, and interprets them correctly. The teaching of Christ commends itself to the ethical nature of man. If it did not, he could not receive it as divine. For it is impossible for a man to receive any doctrine of religion which he perceives to be contrary to reason or to morality. But it is the strength of the Christian religion that it commends itself “to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”

These are the reasons why the attacks of unbelief upon the kingdom of our Lord have been so unsuccessful. If men have been disposed to yield to them for a time, their own spiritual wants have brought them back again to the Faith. This is the reason why we may confidently expect that the religion of Christ will extend over the world. If it were a speculation, a dogma, a science, it might come to naught. But as it appeals to the deepest and most spiritual part of us, it must live. It will win

its way to the hearts of men. Those "who labor and are heavy laden" will seek this rest for their souls. Those who carry the burdens of sin will behold Him "who taketh away the sin of the world." And all those who seek communion with infinite purity and love will come unto the All-Father for peace and pardon and eternal life. In their lighter moods men will still say, "Lo, here!" or "Lo, there!" but in their seasons of profoundest feeling they will come to Him who "is able to save unto the uttermost all who come unto God by Him." "His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation."

III.

LOVE TO CHRIST, THE TRUE MOTIVE IN
THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.



III.

LOVE TO CHRIST THE TRUE MOTIVE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

For the love of Christ constraineth us.—2 COR. v. 14.

By the love of Christ in this passage, we are to understand Christ's love for us. This love seemed to the Apostle so great that it ought to rule his life. Since Christ has died for us, "they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again." This motive, St. Paul says, held him in bonds,—shut him in from the lower and personal objects of life. He had spoken before of the *fear* of the Lord — or, as the older version has it, "the terrors of the Lord" — as a motive, for he says, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ;" but, after all, it is love and not fear that directs his life.

The best illustration of the meaning of the text is the story of Paul's own life. We can trace the history of his Christian enthusiasm. We know the day and the hour when his love for Christ began. We know what sort of man he was before, and what he became afterwards. The earnestness of his preaching, his disregard of personal interest, the zeal that

was never damped, the courage with which he faced danger and persecution,— all show that the ruling power in his life was gratitude and love to the divine Redeemer. It was not chiefly interest in a great cause. Nor was it mainly the impulse of humanity. His addresses and his epistles show that the ruling power in his life was love for the Christ. He speaks of himself as “the servant of Jesus Christ,” “called to be an apostle,” “separated unto the gospel of God.”¹ He gave his whole heart to Christ in return for the fulness of divine love which he found in Him, and this changed not only the plan of his life, but also his personal character, and made him a patient, humble, and self-denying apostle and missionary.

The text will lead me to speak of The Love of Christ as the true motive in the Christian life.

I.

I begin by saying that *there is no true obedience to God except that which is free and hearty.* God is love, and love is the fulfilling of His law. The great commandment is: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself.”² A religion of fear does not meet this requirement, nor a religion of duty, nor a religion that springs from self-interest. One child in a family may be obedient because he is afraid of punishment, another because he expects a reward, and a third because he feels that it would be wrong to disobey. But the

¹ Romans i. 1.

² St. Mark xii. 31.

really dutiful child obeys his father and his mother because he loves them. His motive is not fear, or self-interest, or duty, but affection. He fears nothing so much as to grieve them. He desires nothing so much as to please them. His duty is his delight, because his heart is in it. Love is the true basis of religion,—love to God, our Father, the purest and best of beings. This must have been the original religion of mankind, which bound them to the Creator as dutiful and loving children.

This was the religion of the Old Testament. God chose Israel as His own people, and sought to lead them to do His will, as the expression of their gratitude and affection. So far as they were really His people, they entered into this religion of love. Abraham believed God, and his faith was a loving trust in Him. David said, “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God.”¹ The Psalms reveal the same struggles with sin, and the same sense of dependence upon God’s mercy, and the same trust in His love, that a devout Christian feels, so that they are the best means we have to express all the phases of a Christian experience. The religion of the prophets was also a religion of love. God revealed Himself to draw them by the excellence of His character.

On the other hand, the religions of the heathen have been, for the most part, religions of fear and selfishness, or, at the best, religions of duty. There has been no love in them. Men have always felt dependent. Many of the evils they suffer are ob-

¹ Psalms xlii. 1.

scure and mysterious, and imagination creates for our minds unseen agents and powers of evil, and fear has led to the cruel rites of paganism. Conscience has added to the fears of men. St. Paul saw men all about him who were governed by such motives as these in their religious services. When he stood on Mars Hill he did not address a people without religious ideas, for he was surrounded by the most beautiful temples the world has ever seen; but a people whose religious ideas needed to be corrected by the teachings of Christ. The world was full of religions — such as they were — before Christ came. What He added to religion was not so much new truths as a fuller revelation of the love of God. He was able to bring God so near to men that His love now rules their lives.

II.

Let us see, in the next place, *How Christ revealed God to men*. We may take St. Paul as a representative of the more enlightened men of his time. He knew God before he had any knowledge of the personal Christ, for he was familiar with the Old Testament, and especially with God's dealings with Israel; and with the sacrifices, and all the services of the temple. He knew God not only as He is revealed in nature and in conscience, but he knew Him as the Leader of His people, their Lawgiver, and their moral Governor. He did not need another prophet to reveal God. All that prophets could do to this end had been done by those wonderful men

whose inspired writings were read in the synagogues every Sabbath day. Nor did St. Paul need new miracles to authenticate God's revelation. The one thing that he did need was to bring these truths so near to his heart that they would mould his character and control his life. In order to do this, Paul needed, in some way, to come nearer to God as a personal Friend and Helper.

This is what the Incarnation does. He who "was in the beginning with God, and who was God," "was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."¹ We count our years from the day of His birth, because that day marks the beginning of a new era. The angels sang "peace on earth, good will to men," because a Saviour was born. The leading fact in redemption, on which all the rest depends, is the fact that the Son of God became the Son of Man so as to reveal God to men more perfectly. In this sense, it is no doubt true that it is not so much the work of Christ that is important as the Person of Christ,—the fact that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself," that He who is the "effulgence of His glory and the very image of His substance"² took our nature, and became our Brother, bearing our griefs and our sorrows. He did this, we are told again and again, so as to commend the love of God unto us. In very deed, "though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor, that we, through His poverty might become rich."³ This is what He always claimed, that His Father had sent

¹ St. John i. 14.

² Heb. i. 3.

³ 2 Cor. viii. 9.

Him, because He loved sinful men, and desired to save them. He said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," and He taught that "men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father." This, then, is the great fact in respect to the life of our Lord: that the Son of God became flesh, and dwelt with men, that he might in that way reveal God to them.

As we read the Gospels, we are impressed, first of all, with the *reality* of His life. He was as truly human as He was divine. He did not come among men as a full-grown man, but as an infant. He did not separate Himself from the experiences of a common human life, but He was born into a family; He was subject unto His parents, as other children are; He increased in wisdom and in stature; He went, "as His custom was, to the synagogue" on the Sabbath day.

If the Son of God were to live among men, to reveal God to them, He would need to *enter very fully into the experiences of men*. He could have been born in a palace, and lived the life of a prince. Or He could have been born into a home of wealth, and lived in luxury, apart from the masses of men. Or He could have been such a man as John the Baptist, who dwelt in the deserts, and shunned the companionship of men, and the pure joys of life. But the life of Jesus touched the common lives of men at the greatest number of points. He did not shield himself from the experiences of common men by wealth, or rank, or station. He was a man of the people; born in poverty, as the largest number of men have been. He shared the conditions of a

humble home, in a small country town; and in His later life, He had not even such a place as that to shelter Him. It is true that when He was transfigured, "His face did shine as the sun, and His garments became white as the light."¹ But this was only once in His lifetime. For the rest, He lived with the common people and wore the dress of a common man, and shared the food of fishermen, and ate with publicans and sinners. He was not a man of exclusive tastes, or of narrow sympathies. He went, not only to the dwellings of the poor, but to the homes of the rich; not only to places of sorrow, but into scenes of festivity. He was a true Son of man, linked with the highest and with the lowest, in full sympathy with little children, and with young men, and with all such as suffer, and with the tempted and the fallen; and His gracious words as truly as His gracious acts revealed in a human life the wonderful love of God. It was by this life among men that Jesus was fitted to bear our sins. We do not understand the Atonement until we understand the deep meaning of the life of our Lord. He was fitted to bear our sins, because he had first borne our griefs and our sorrows. He made Himself an offering for sin by His own voluntary act, showing how much God loved us by taking our condemnation, and honoring the justice of God by His sacrificial death.

There is no other thing that awakens so deep an interest in us as the experiences of a brother man. We see the evidences of God's goodness and wisdom

¹ St. Matthew xvii. 4.

in nature; we read the revelations He has made in the older Scriptures; but they do not touch us very deeply. But when we come to know the love of God in sending His Son to die for us, as a man may die for his friend, then "the love of Christ constraineth us."

Some time ago I studied a painting, by an American artist, which is called "The Heart of the Andes." I was impressed at once by the grandeur of the mountains. My eye followed the valleys that opened on this side and on that,—valleys shadowed by mountains that seemed to bear up the very heavens. It was a view of nature in her loftier moods. But, after all, the picture is cold, and fails to kindle one's imagination until he looks at the hunter's cabin in the foreground, from which the smoke of the morning fire is rising, and at the hunters themselves, who stand leaning on their rifles, looking down the valley. That glimpse of human life, in those awful solitudes, touches deeper sympathies than nature can move; aye, that life adds sublimity to the mountains themselves, because their shadows fall on living men.

God has painted for us on the great historic canvas of this world a picture which is to reveal His goodness. It is very beautiful, full of the tokens of His wisdom and goodness. He hung up the picture that men might study it, and might see His glory. But they did not regard it. They worshipped idols, the work of their own hands. After a few centuries the divine Artist retouched the picture, bringing out new and more wonderful illustrations of His holiness and His love. But still the world passed it by. In

the fulness of time, God painted, in the foreground of the picture, a human form, — the form of the well-beloved Son; a “Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;” “His visage so marred, more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men,”¹ and this divine Man is pointing to His own Cross, and telling those who labor and are heavy laden to come unto Him, and find rest for their souls. And now the old picture stirs the world, according to Christ’s own words, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”² That one sensitive, personal Being, divine and yet human, our Lord and yet our Brother, who loves us with all a brother’s affection, brings God near to us. One real look at the cross must melt any human heart. And so the love of Christ is subduing the world unto Him. God is so near that He draws us, and we follow Him. His love kindles our love, and we become His children because we are the children of His love, for “whosoever loveth is born of God, and knoweth God, for God is love.”³

III.

We come, then, in the last place, to consider *How the love of Christ has directed the lives of His disciples.*

Here, too, we may well go back to the times of the Apostles, and see how they presented Christ, and how the early Christians received Him. It is very plain that the great effort of the Apostles was to pre-

¹ Isa. liii. 3.

² St. John xii. 32.

³ 1 John iv. 7.

sent the personal Christ to men. It was not a system of philosophy or of doctrines which they preached, nor a new organization, but a Saviour whom they had seen, and whose teachings they were able to repeat. "We are His witnesses," they said. He has called us, and sent us to you. His is the only name by which you can be saved. "I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ."¹ In fact, the name which was naturally given to the disciples was Christians, as the personal followers of the Christ.

You will call to mind also that this is the way in which our Saviour Himself talked to men. The most common direction He gave was this: "Follow me." "I am the Way," He said, "and the Truth, and the life."² "If any man thirst, let him come unto me." "Come unto me all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."³ Moses did not teach men so. Samuel did not. None of the prophets would have dared to teach men to come unto them for rest and salvation. They called upon men to obey the commands of God, and to do His will. But Christ called men to Himself. He called for their supreme devotion. They must leave all else for His sake. They must not count their lives dear unto themselves. "If any man will be my disciple let him deny himself, and take up the cross and follow me."⁴

This personal devotion to Christ has characterized the lives of Christians in all the periods of spiritual prosperity. The early disciples confessed Him be-

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 2.

² St. John xiv. 6.

³ St. Matthew xi. 28.

⁴ St. Matthew xvi. 24.

fore their persecutors. They went to their martyrdom because they would not deny Him. "Eighty and six years have I served Him," said Polycarp, "and He has always been my Helper, and shall I now deny Him to save my life?"¹ The early hymns of the Church are full of this tender personal devotion. The early confessions and creeds place Christ in the centre, as the one object of faith and love. The early missionaries went forth only in His name, to make known the Saviour to the pagans.

It was only as religion declined that the attention of men was absorbed in the Church as a great organization, and in systems of doctrine, and in methods of worship. Whenever the life of piety has been rekindled in the Church, the love of Christ has revived, and He has become again the one object of love and of faith.

This love always leads to *personal devotion*. The disciple gives his whole heart to the Redeemer. His love becomes an enthusiasm. It never counts the cost. It begins by giving all. So that the love of Christ has shown itself to be, by far, the most powerful motive of human action. It has been stronger than the love of wealth, for many have made themselves poor for Christ's sake. It has been stronger than the love of friends or of country, for many have left father, and mother, and native land, to preach Christ to the heathen. In fact, there is no heroism in this world except that which is inspired by love, and there is no sort of heroism so common or so grand as that which is inspired by the love of Christ.

¹ Ante-Nicene Christian Fathers, vol. I., p. 88.

This love also *unites us with Christ*. Faith reveals God and spiritual things to the believer, so that he knows God and Christ according to these profound words of our Lord: "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."¹ It is only in this way of love and trust that we can know Him whom we have not seen, and know the things that are spiritual. It is not by the understanding, with its slow processes, *but by a direct beholding*, when the heart is opened to God, and He reveals Himself to us, that we gain a sense of the reality of the spiritual, which uplifts us from the earth, and fills us with longing for the glory that shall be revealed.

This personal love for Christ also leads to *the confidence of faith*. Perfect love casteth out fear. "We live as seeing Him who is invisible," and "we know that nothing shall be able to separate us from His love, neither things present, nor things to come."

Thus we see that true religion has its beginning in God's love for us, and that love is its very life and soul. "The love of Christ constraineth us," because He revealed the very heart of God, and that love draws us towards God by an attraction constant as that which holds the suns and constellations in their revolutions about the central throne.

This is a truth concerning the essential thing in our religion which men are always forgetting. They are apt to think of some experiences, or some outward duties, when they should think of union with

¹ St. John xvii. 3.

Christ. There have been times when it was more common to appeal to the fears and the selfish desires of men, than to their consciences and their hearts. The progress of religion in our day is indicated by the emphasis which the pulpit now places upon the motives that come from the love of Christ. Our modern theology gives Christ the central position, and exalts the cross to the highest place among the motives to lead men from lives of sin.

I think, too, that the emphasis which is now placed upon the love of Christ is making the religious life more cheerful and more fruitful. It is adding to the gentleness, and generosity, and consecration of Christians. It is making our methods of worship more simple, and is leading to a new interest in the service of song. It is drawing the children to the Saviour, and is filling the land with Societies of Christian Endeavor. It is bringing the branches of the divided Church into a closer union. This love, which was kindled by the love of Christ, is sending missionaries to every tribe and nation. This love for Christ is yet to overcome the evil of the world, and to lead greater masses of men to holiness and to God.

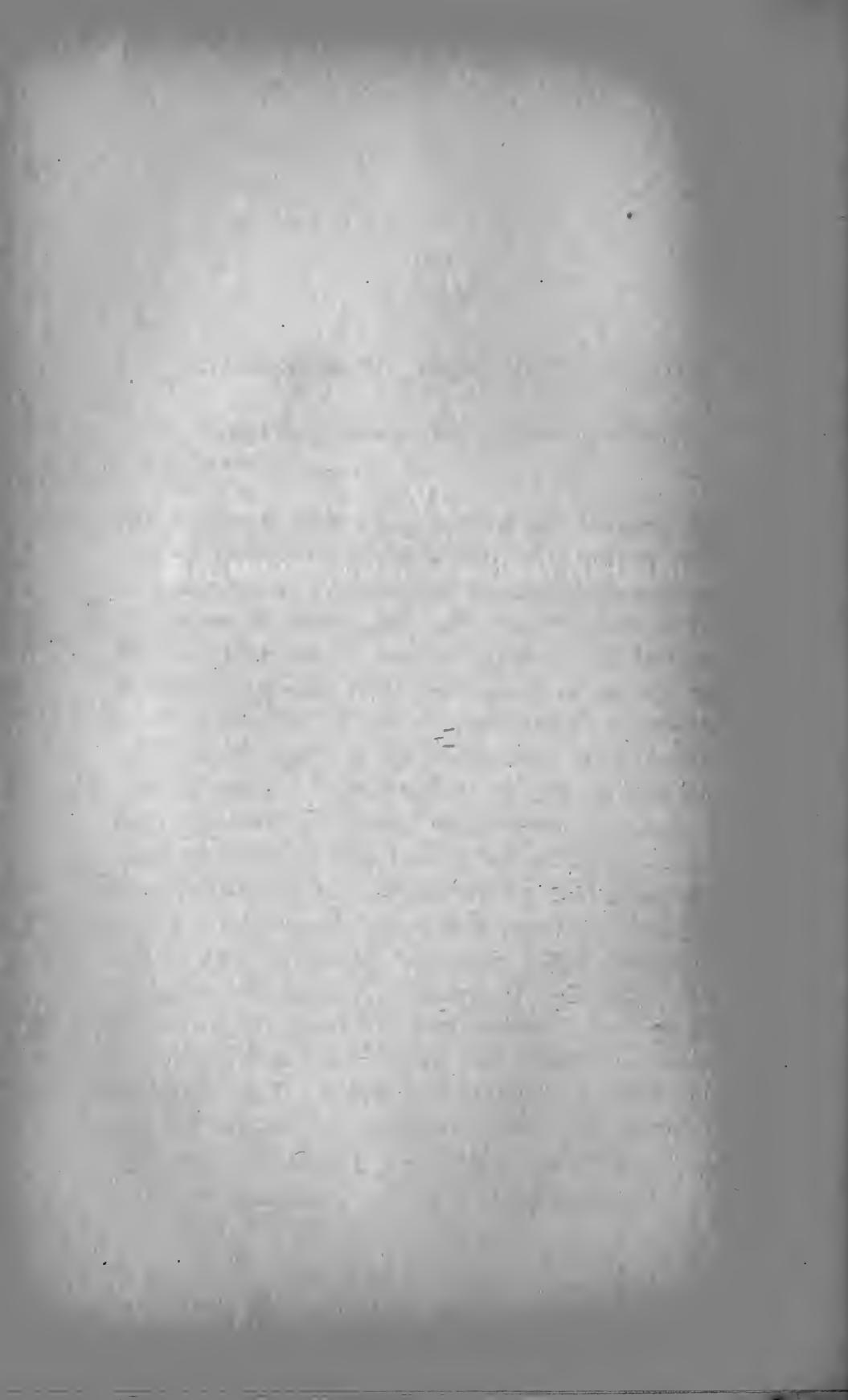
Let us enter with all our hearts into this life of love. Let us seek to come so near to the heart of our Redeemer, that we "being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God."¹

¹ Ephesians iii. 19.



IV.

CHRIST, THE MAN OF SORROWS.



IV.

CHRIST, THE MAN OF SORROWS.

A Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.

ISAIAH liii. 3.

THE prophet was writing a great while before the Saviour was born of what God had revealed to him concerning the expected Redeemer. Isaiah was permitted to look through the dim vistas of seven centuries, and this is what he saw at the end: — “his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men:” “he hath no form nor comeliness: and when we see him there is no beauty that we should desire him:” “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”¹ Abraham had seen his day long before and had rejoiced, because that through Him all the families of the earth would be blessed.² Moses had some knowledge of His coming, and of the blessings He would bring to His people. So had David and Nathan the prophet. But Isaiah was a little nearer His time, and his vision was more distinct. The glory of the golden period in the history of Israel had faded. The Kingdom of Solomon had been divided, and at last the ten tribes had gone into captivity. Judah only remained,

¹ Isa. lii. 14; liii. 2-3.

² Genesis xii. 3.

and her power was diminishing. It was natural for the Jews to look with increasing interest for the advent of the Messiah, who was expected to bring them deliverance. And this is the picture revealed to the prophet; the only distinct view which any prophet had ever gained:— the suffering Saviour, wounded for our transgressions; bruised for our iniquities; on whom “the Lord hath laid the iniquity of us all.”¹ This was the promised Redeemer; the Prince of the house of David, for whose advent their fathers had been praying for generations.

I.

Let us compare this prophetic vision of the expected Messiah with His actual life in the world.

Our divine Lord accepted a heritage of sorrow in taking our human nature with its limitations. He who was in the beginning with God,² who ruled the spiritual world, took the form of a servant, was born of a woman, became an infant of days, and from His state of infancy, “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”³ We sometimes say of our friends who have gone to heaven, that we would not call them back to the sorrows of this life if we had the power. But what is the blessedness they would leave in comparison with that which He left when “he became flesh and dwelt among us.”⁴ It is quite impossible for us to measure His condescension. He laid aside His glory. He came under

¹ Isaiah liii. 4-7.

² St. John i. 2.

³ St. Luke ii. 52.

⁴ St. John i. 14.

the law. He took a lower place as Mediator, so that He said with truth, "My Father is greater than I."¹ He became dependent so that He needed to pray; — He, in whose name all our prayers are offered. He was hungry, and thirsty, and weary, and grieved, and "in all points tempted like as we are."² "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."³

Add to this His lowly condition. The highest condition among men would involve infinite condescension in the Son of God. If He were to come to this world at all, it would seem fitting that He should come with all the dignity of a princely birth, in the court of a king. If there be any value in these human distinctions, He deserves them all. But how wide the contrast. He was born in Bethlehem, — not in Jerusalem. "There was no room for them in the inn."⁴ Mary "wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in the manger."⁵ They had to flee into Egypt by night. When Herod was dead they came and dwelt in Nazareth; "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"⁶ He was known sometimes as the carpenter's son, and sometimes as the carpenter. He wore the dress of a Galilean peasant, so that the scribes wondered that one of such an appearance could so much as read. "Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor;"⁷ and it meant a great deal more to be poor at that time in Palestine than it means here and now. There were only two classes then, and the gulf between the rich and the

¹ St. John xiv. 28.

⁵ Ibid.

² Hebrews iv. 15.

⁶ St. John i. 46.

³ St. Matthew viii. 17.

⁷ 2 Cor. viii. 9.

⁴ St. Luke ii. 7.

poor was very wide. Influence, power, entrance to the higher circles, — these were for the rich; but for the common people, there was little honor or sympathy. But Jesus took His place among them. His companions were the fishermen of Galilee. He addressed those of His own class. “The common people heard Him gladly.”¹ But He was poor even among the lowly. “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head.”²

And then, “He was despised and rejected of men.” “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.”³ Many of those who followed Him for a time “went back, and walked no more with Him,” so that He said to His disciples, “will ye also go away?” Some have spoken of the loneliness of Christ. Very few, even of His disciples, were able to enter into the spiritual truths He was teaching. They were “slow of heart to receive all that the prophets had spoken.” There was no one in all the world able to appreciate the revelation He was making. The larger number of the leaders of the people were enemies of the truth.

So that Jesus was brought at every step into contact with sin. It had never taken on forms so atrocious. It added to His sorrows inasmuch as He was revealing the love of God towards the children of men. If men despised and rejected Him, it went to His heart, like the ingratitude of a son to the heart of an affectionate father. We can appreciate the sorrows of Jesus when we see Him at the close of

¹ St. Mark xii. 37.

³ Isa. liii. 3: St. John i. 11.

² St. Matthew viii. 20.

His ministry of love, weeping over the holy city, and saying: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, . . . but ye would not."¹ Thus, His earthly ministry ended in tears, and His life went out under the shadow of a great sorrow.

Add to this life of sorrow the death by crucifixion. He had been looking forward to this death for a long time. The shadow of the cross was over Him from the beginning. He taught His disciples that He had come into the world to lay down His life for men.

So that the prophetic vision did not mislead the ancient seer. The man whom he saw in prophetic vision was to be pre-eminent among the great sufferers of the world as "the Man of sorrows."

We are not to think of the sorrows of the Redeemer as mere accidents in His life. He came to the world to do the very things which he actually did. All possible modes of life were open to His choice, and He selected the life of humiliation and poverty and persecution, and the death of the cross. "No man taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."²

II.

WHY WAS THIS WAY OF LIFE CHOSEN? Why did not the Saviour of the world follow a mode of life more in accordance with the common views of reformers? We should not turn aside the edge of the

¹ St. Matthew xxiii. 37.

² St. John x. 18.

question, for it points us towards the distinctive work of the Redeemer.

Why did not Jesus come as a philosopher, like Confucius, or like Socrates, or like some of the leaders of thought in our day, who believe that the world is to be saved by wisdom? Why did He not come as an inventor to apply the advancing knowledge of the world to the practical arts of life? He might have brought in the printing-press fourteen hundred years earlier than it came; and the mariner's compass, and even steamboats, and railways, and telegraphs, and telephones. He could have set forward civilization in these ways, and developed commerce, and awakened the human mind to the study of nature? Why did He not do these things if the highest wants of men are to be met in that way?

How different a life the Redeemer would have had if He had become a geologist, — teaching His disciples to read "the testimony of the rocks;" or if He had become a biologist, tracing the course of life from the primordial germ up through all the stages of its development to a perfected manhood; or if He had become a great poet like Shakespeare, or a great statesman, or a jurist who could teach men to reconstruct the decaying framework of society upon the basis of personal freedom and republican government; or if He had been a great warrior, as David was, and had brought the surrounding nations under the sway of Israel, and sent out the truth of God among the nations by means of conquest?

To my mind these inquiries point the way to the distinctive features of the method by which God is

seeking to save the lost world. Unroll, if you please, the scroll of history, and read the names of the elect geniuses of the race. Here is an eloquent orator, there is a teacher of wisdom, a leader and commander of men, a reformer, a philanthropist, but these did not succeed in saving men. When the true Redeemer appears, He is "the man of sorrows."

You cannot account for it by saying that the Jews of His time had lost the spirit of religion and become formal and hypocritical. For the question still remains, Why did Jesus begin His life in poverty and obscurity? Why was He cradled in a manger, and reared in the humble home in distant Galilee? Why was His earthly lot cast among the lowly? Why did the Almighty permit sorrows to thicken about His path, from His birth to His crucifixion?

We have already seen that this was a matter of prophecy. "They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture they did cast lots."¹ "They pierced my hands and my feet."² These are from the Psalms. "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep dumb before her shearers, so he opened not his mouth."³ This with much more is from Isaiah. Daniel also spoke of a time when Messiah should "be cut off."⁴ It is clear that the Lord had chosen that the Redeemer of men should accomplish His work by suffering rather than by doing.

WHY WAS IT?

I should say in general terms *because He desired to draw all men from their sins and bring them into com-*

¹ Ps. xxii. 18. ² Ps. xxii. 16. ³ Isa. liii. 7. ⁴ Daniel ix. 26.

union with God. The great fact was that men were estranged from God. The Redeemer must save them from their sins.

Who can measure *the power of sympathy* that draws us to the suffering Saviour? The lost world was after all a vast hospital full of the sick and the suffering, the weary and the heavy laden, the helpless slaves of sin. One does not go to minister to the inmates of a hospital with festive robes and the insignia of high rank. It is very significant that the Saviour of men took our infirmities and sicknesses upon Himself. One side of redemption has for its object to win sinful men from the ways of evil. Knowledge will not do this. Art and poetry and philosophy will not do this. Has not vice flourished in the ages of the finest artistic culture? Would any gifts or honors of a prince draw a people from the love of sin?

Men are not made better except by the power of goodness. A pure and beautiful life in a dark world, — there is no other power like it. Especially if this life touches us by some tie of sympathy. If it belongs to one who loves us better than all others, and takes upon Himself the burden of our suffering, and even lays down His life to save us.

The poverty and sorrow in the life of Jesus bring Him into connection with the greatest number of men. For poverty and sorrow are the heritage of the majority of men. By His condescension to our low estate the Redeemer came into the closest relations with the lives of common men. Others have tried to make men better by enlightening their minds, but Jesus does it by showing in His own life the

beauty of holiness, and softening their hearts by His self-denying love. When men realize that they have been sinning against a God of love, and that He has sent His son to share their grief and pain so as to win them from evil and raise them to the society of angels, then they feel the power of the gospel.

The next reason why the Saviour was the man of sorrows comes nearer the central truth of Redemption. Jesus came to bear the sins of men. But sin brings sorrow. "There is no peace to the wicked." The world was made fair as Eden, and was designed to be the abode of a happy race. But the evil that men do has blighted it all, and hung the very heavens with mourning.

Is there not a certain fitness between the humiliation and sorrow of the Saviour, and the work He was to do for men? I have no assertions to put forth, but it has seemed to me that One who was to redeem and save the guilty,—those who had arrayed themselves against the Infinite Purity and Love,—that the Redeemer of sinful men, ought not to put on anything of splendor or glory; that the fitness of things required that He should lay aside whatever high things belonged to Him, and take a place somewhat like that which sinners deserved. The higher His place had been before, the more His voluntary humiliation would honor the righteousness of God. It has seemed fitting that the Redeemer of the sinful should humble Himself, and take the place of a servant, and live under the shadow of adversity. Not because God is implacable. But there is such a thing as righteousness, as justice which is the basis of law,

and the moral sentiments of men condemn injustice as wrong. Would it be quite congruous, therefore, for one who had come to seek and save the sinful, to come to His mission in power and glory, sitting upon a throne, living in prosperity, and making his life a triumph? Is it not more fitting that He who was "to bear our sins" should be, for the short time of His earthly life, a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief?"

But this does not by any means exhaust the teachings of the Bible in respect to the purpose of the suffering of our Saviour. *Those teachings connect His suffering directly with the guilt of men.* The "altar terms," as they have been called, are very commonly used by the writers of the New Testament in connection with the suffering and the death of our Saviour. In the beginning of His ministry He was announced as "The Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world."¹ He tells us that His "blood was shed for many, unto remission of sins."²

It is easy to overstate the truth in respect to this matter. It is not a theme for dogmatism. It is not true that God was, in any sense, the enemy of the sinner, or that He needed to be made friendly by an offering. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life."³ But God is holy and righteous. Sin deserves His condemnation. The love of God cannot obscure His justice. "Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of

¹ St. John i. 29.

³ St. John iii. 16.

² St. Matthew xxvi. 28.

his throne.”¹ “One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law.”² I am sure that those who have any true sense of the evil desert of sin will feel that it was impossible for God to pass it by without an expiation. His holiness and His truth forbade it.

What then are the facts as the Bible states them? Christ came to a sinful world to lay down His life for the sins of men. He became our Redeemer, our Ransom, our Sacrifice. By His death we have life. Through His cross we have the offer of salvation. “He bare our sins in His own body on the tree.”³

How fitting it was, then, that He who was to come into so close a relation to the sins of the world should be marked out before His birth as “the man of sorrows:” that He whose mission it was to redeem the sinful should be one whose “visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men”: that He who was to atone for human guilt should share that lot of pain and persecution, which shows so impressively the results of sin; that around His blessed head the storms of life should be suffered to beat; that mockery, and buffeting, and the crown of thorns, and the nails piercing His hands and His feet should be in His life the symbols as well of the hatefulness of sin as of the cost of Redemption?

III.

If these things are so, we can understand *why it was that the cross of Christ was made so prominent in the preaching of the early apostles*. For the cross

¹ Ps. xcvi. 2.

² St. Matt. v. 18.

³ 1 Peter ii. 24.

represents all that lies deepest in the work of the Redeemer. We are saved through His sufferings and His death. So that, in the Last Supper, we commemorate the death of Christ. The elements which He directed us to use represent, not His miracles, nor His teachings, nor His pure and perfect life, but "His body broken for us:" "His blood shed for the remission of sins." When St. Paul determined to know nothing "save Jesus Christ and Him crucified,"¹ he was laying hold on the central element in the gospel. The great victories of Christianity have been won by the preaching of the cross.

We can understand also *why the disciples of Christ are sometimes appointed to lives of humiliation and of suffering.* Is it not fitting that we should be partakers of the sufferings of Christ?² Is it not fitting that we, who have been redeemed with precious blood, should bear in our lives some traces of the evil lot which we have deserved by our sins? Enough for us that we may be forgiven; enough that heaven will know no sorrow. But so long as we are still in the world which sin has blighted, it would be unseemly if we were to go untouched by sorrow, unscathed by the flame.

Sorrow has for us a cleansing, curative mission. Disappointments, bereavements, sicknesses, and infirmities are the means by which we are to be refined and purified. "I have refined thee but not as silver: I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction."³ "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, as though a strange thing happened unto

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 2.

² 1 Peter iv. 13.

³ Isaiah xlvi. 10.

you, but rather rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings.”¹ “The God of all grace . . . after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect.”² The light of heaven allures us. But this is not heaven. This is the pilgrimage,—the time of discipline. We are now only in the process of redemption. But our Father will keep us. We shall not be tempted above that we are able.³ The joys He sends should awaken our gratitude; and even the touch of sorrow is a consecrating chrism.

One other lesson we should learn from the Man of Sorrows, which is this: *We need to take upon our feeling the sorrows of those whom we seek to help and save.* We need to go down to them, as the Saviour did, and bear their griefs and sorrows. We need to enter in some real way into sympathy with the suffering and the sinful, so as to become ourselves men of sorrow, “and acquainted with grief.” There is a sense in which we are to “bear their sins.” The power that saves men is the power of love, and love gives itself joyfully for the object it seeks. We have only touched the outer rim of the cup which our Saviour drank, so long as we are only *sending* help to the perishing. We begin to drink of His cup, and to be baptised with His Baptism, when there is no one of the children of sin around us whose case we do not make our own, whose sins we do not bear on our hearts. This vicarious love will make us the true disciples of the Man of Sorrows, and will make us sharers of His power to draw all men unto Himself.

¹ 1 Peter iv. 12-13.

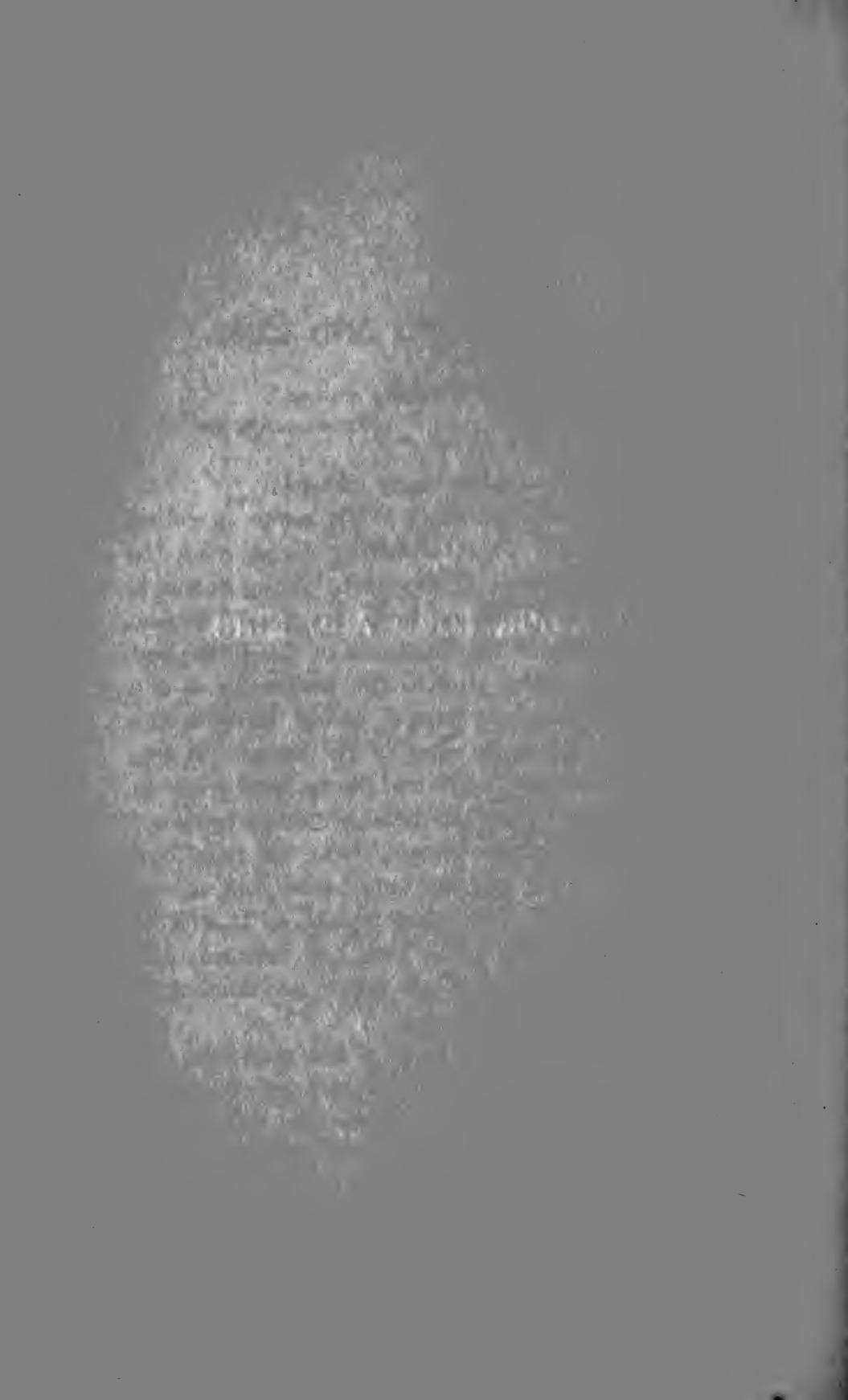
² 1 Peter v. 10.

³ 1 Cor. x. 13.



V.

CHRIST OUR LORD AND KING.



V.

CHRIST OUR LORD AND KING.

On His head are many crowns.

REVELATION xix. 12.

WHO is it who wears the many crowns?

In the next verse we read, "His name is called the Word of God." A little farther on we read, He hath a name written on His vesture, "King of kings, and Lord of lords." These texts are found in one of the last chapters of the last book of the Bible, and they give us the latest view of the Redeemer, — the view which the inspired writers would have in the mind of the Church to the end of the world. It sets Him before us as our Lord and King, who rules in earth and heaven. "On His head are many crowns," or as the revised version reads, "On his head are many diadems." He has not one crown but many, or rather, the crown has many jewels so that it is more brilliant than any other king can ever wear, — a crown so resplendent that all others are content to cast their crowns at His feet.

We have to turn back only a few pages in the Apocalypse to find a very different representation of the Redeemer. John saw in heaven, "A Lamb standing as though it had been slain," and he heard the new song which said: "Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and

wisdom, and might, and honor, and glory, and blessing.”¹ These two are combined in that ancient Christian emblem,—the Cross and the Crown. Certainly we need them both. He was “the man of sorrows.”² “His visage was so marred more than any man.”³ “He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities.”⁴ His blood was “shed for many unto the remission of sins.”⁵ This is the view of the Redeemer that is most common in the thoughts of Christians. It is the view upon which the best preachers place the strongest emphasis. The best hymns of the Church are full of it. It is the view which Christian artists have set forth in so many forms of imperishable beauty. It is fitting that the cross should be the distinctive emblem of Him who has tasted “death for every man.”⁶ But we need the other view also to give meaning to His humiliation and His suffering, and to give a healthy tone to our piety. He came from a throne of glory when He became the Son of Man, and He entered again into His glory when, after His resurrection, He was lifted up from the earth and a cloud received Him out of the sight of His disciples.⁷

I do not know that we can think too much of the sufferings and death of our Lord, but it is quite possible to think too little of the glory which He had with the Father before the world was,⁸—the glory into which He entered when the atoning work was

¹ Revelation v. 6-12.

⁵ St. Matthew xxvi. 28.

² Isaiah liii. 3.

⁶ Hebrews ii. 9.

³ Isaiah lii. 14.

⁷ Acts i. 9.

⁴ Isaiah liii. 5.

⁸ St. John xvii. 5.

done. He is our Lord as truly as He is our Saviour, and His glory is greater than His humiliation.

Let us meditate to-day upon Christ as our Lord and King.

We can sometimes appreciate things that are divine by comparing them with things that are human. We may learn to appreciate the crown which our Lord wears by comparing it with the crowns which the rulers of this world are wearing. For the crown is no more than a symbol of the highest authority. We may be able to work towards a comprehension of the King of kings by setting His authority alongside that of the rulers of men.

Take as one point of the comparison *the extent of one's dominions*. There is a certain glory in any supreme authority. Any one looks with a certain respect upon a governor, or a president, or a king. But what if one be the ruler of a small country as the kings of Saxony are. Is not the queen of England, upon whose dominions the sun never sets, greater than the king of a small principality in Germany?

Take as another point of comparison the *nature*, and *character*, and *achievements* of a ruler. It is easy to see the difference between a ruler whose title is simply an inheritance, like that of the present emperor of Germany, and one who, like Washington, has been the Saviour of his country; who has won for it the position it enjoys by his own suffering and his supreme endeavors. If such an one becomes the chief ruler, the abundance of his services, and the

excellence of his character will add to the splendor of his government. He will rule because he is “first in the hearts of his countrymen.” And if, in addition to all this, the ruler be a large hearted man so that the humblest of his people can be sure that he cares for him, and that he is ready to counsel and help him as the father of his people, is it not plain that every admirable quality of his mind and his heart will add to the glory of his administration? In such ways as these we can work towards an appreciation of our Lord and King. He is above all others, partly because of what He is, and partly because of what He has done.

I.

One of the many crowns of our Lord is *the crown of Divinity*. There is a limit to the authority of the highest created being, because, as St. Paul tells us, “there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God.”¹ If, then, our Lord were only the highest created being, there would be an authority higher than His own to which He would owe allegiance. The Apostles said to the Jewish rulers, “whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye,”² and a little later they said, “We must obey God rather than men.”³ If we were to assign to our Lord a place lower than that of Deity, it would be impossible that His name should be “above every name,” and that “in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of

¹ Romans xiii. 1. ² Acts iv. 19. ³ Acts v. 29.

things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”¹ This then is the glory of the Christ, that He does not rule by any delegated authority, for He is himself the source of all authority and power. By Him “Kings reign, and princes decree justice.”²

As He is divine, He has the crown of *universal dominion*. We cannot compare His kingdom with any human kingdom, for the greatest of these have their limitations. There have been elements of weakness in empires as imperial as Rome in the time of her greatest glory. Thus far in the world’s history nations have had their periods of growth and of decline and fall. The crown of the Cæsars has lost its lustre, and the iron crown of Charlemagne is only a curious relic preserved in a museum, and exhibited to modern tourists. The crown which Christ wears is not like these. “Of the increase of His government and of peace there shall be no end.”³

“Jesus shall reign where’er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run.”

II.

Our Lord also wears the crown of *a complete and perfect humanity*. The question is, Why should we crown Him Lord of all? and the answer is, Because He who “was in the beginning with God,” and who was truly God,⁴ has come so near to us as to become

¹ Philippians ii. 9-11.

³ Isaiah ix. 7.

² Proverbs viii. 15.

⁴ St. John i. 1-2.

the Son of Man, so that He “can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” for He “was tempted in all points like as we are.”¹

The humiliation of our Lord by His union with our humanity involves mysteries which it is beyond our power to fathom. We only know this: that being in the form of God, He “emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.”² The Scriptures give no explanation of this mystery of the Kenosis, but they teach us that Jesus was truly a man; that he had the sensibilities and the limitations of a man; that He was really and truly tempted; that He needed to pray; that there were some things which He did not know, and some things which the Father had put in His own power.³ In the time of His humiliation He prayed to the Father,—“Glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”⁴ They teach us to think of Him not as two beings, but as one being, the God-man, who in His complete person bore our griefs and carried our sorrows.

The power of Jesus the Christ to sway the hearts of men is a personal power. It is that of a real man with a sensitive nature, and a warm human heart. We come very near to Him when we read the story of His life in the four gospels. Whoever reads these with an open mind will be gaining new impressions of the depth and tenderness of His sensibilities, as well as of the wisdom and strength of His plans.

¹ Hebrews iv. 15.

³ St. Matthew xxiv. 36: St. Mark xiii. 32.

² Philippians ii 7.

⁴ St. John xvii. 5.

There are the elements of a great picture in the experiences of any day of His crowded life, and I do not know that there is one of these experiences that has not furnished a subject for some one of the great Masters. You learn what manner of Man He was when you recall that He took little children in His arms and blessed them;¹ when you learn that He went to the house of the Jewish ruler whose daughter of twelve years old had just died, and standing by the side of the mother and the father, He took the little white hand of the dead child in His own, and spoke the word of power that called her back to life.² It is not merely that He raised her from the dead, but that He did it with so much gentleness and tenderness, taking her hand in His own as if she were His own child. You gain another impression of His nature when you read of His meeting the funeral of the young man of Nain, "the only son of his mother, who was a widow," and, touching the bier that they might not carry him further towards the grave, He called him back to life, and "delivered him to his mother."³ You see this man again, weeping in sympathy at the grave in Bethany, so that those who stood by said, "Behold how He loved Him," and then, calling Lazarus also from the tomb, and sending him back to his own home with his sisters whose faith had not failed in the supreme hour.⁴

In such ways as these, though we have not seen our Lord we have learned to think of His life as full of gentleness and sympathy, beautiful as the life of

¹ St. Mark x. 16.

³ St. Luke vii. 14.

² St. Luke viii. 54.

⁴ St. John xi. 34-44.

a gracious and tender woman, strong as the life of a brave and heroic man, and glorious as the human life of the incarnate Son of God. This inner spirit of the Christ is finely illustrated in Raphael's painting of the Transfiguration. You have there the form of the Redeemer clothed in a garment of light; and His face—that wonderful face—lighted up with divine rapture. But in that face, which did shine as the sun, there is a depth of sensibility, such as you can find in no other, the expression of a love which led Him, as soon as the hour of heavenly communion was over, to go down from the mount of glory to enter again upon His work for the sinful and the lost.

This unselfish love which we find in the Son of Man is one of the sources of His power. I do not know that it is possible to gain the deepest influence over men without possessing a generous and sensitive nature. The heart is moved only by the heart. You must have found illustrations of this truth in your study of history, and music, and art. Those who have done the most successful literary work, and especially those who have been the great leaders of men have been great hearted men, who kept themselves open to the fresh influences of nature, and who were in hearty sympathy with their fellow-men.

You are well aware also how much the power of music depends upon the expression of human feeling, which makes the beautiful tones so much more than mere sounds. It is admitted now that music without words is incomplete music. When the singer puts his heart into the song, he takes us captive.

We call it the power of music, but it is rather the power of a soul, richly gifted, pouring itself in song. Even the great painters owe their power quite as much to their sensibility as to their technical skill. There are thousands of pictures in the galleries of Europe, well drawn and richly colored, that have never gained the hearts of the lovers of art, because there is nothing in them to stir the sensibilities. Let two artists, of equal technical skill, paint the same scene in the life of our Lord, and the one who has himself the deepest feeling, and the fullest appreciation of His character, will be able to throw into his picture those delicate touches of life which appeal to the universal sympathies of men, and this will place his work far above that of his brother artist who has a duller sensibility.

If these things are true with reference to such forms of influence as these, they must be still more evidently true of that spiritual influence which aims to change the very springs of action and the character of the spiritual life. It is not so much the *power* and *wisdom* of Christ as it is the *love* of Christ that constraineth us.¹ It is impossible that our Lord should have set up a spiritual kingdom in such a world as this if He had not been first of all our Saviour.

III.

Our Lord also wears the *crown of perfect righteousness*. It must be so if He combines a divine nature with a perfect human nature. Not only is it true

¹ 2 Cor. v. 14.

that He is holy as to His own character and life, but His teachings lead towards righteousness always. He came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it.¹ He set before men only one standard, and that was perfect righteousness. “Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”² He came to turn men from sin unto righteousness. He did not come to save us by breaking down the law of righteousness, but by honoring that law,—shedding His blood for the remission of sins. He leads us from sin to holiness by the power of His love. The greatest motive to holy living which has ever been presented to men is the love of Christ, which led Him to give His life for us. It is the love of Christ which is drawing men from selfishness and all manner of sin to the life of purity and love.

IV.

This brings us to the statement that *our Lord Jesus wears the crown of love*. He came to reveal the love of the Father for those who were yet sinners. It is a great error to teach that the government of God over the world is purely a government of law,—of law that is immutable, that leaves no place for prayer, and no room for divine providence. For we can think of a method of government that is higher than that. One who rules by power alone, by laws that are cold and pitiless, is not the perfect ruler. A king who loves his people, and whom they love with supreme devotion, is higher than one who gov-

¹ St. Matthew v. 17.

² St. Matthew v. 48.

erns by force. "God is love," and love is greater than power, and God sent His Son to manifest His love to men.

If God is love, then He must needs take upon Himself the sorrows of men; for does not love lead us to bear one another's burdens? So that we are to think of our divine Lord as the great Burden-bearer. It is His glory that He has a nature sensitive to every joy or sorrow of those whom He loves. So that He is able to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows.

V.

His crown is therefore *the crown of mercy*. His love extends to those who are yet sinners, and so it is a complete and all-embracing love. It is the highest glory of our Lord that His followers have been redeemed with His blood; just as — to compare the greatest things with those that are less — it would be the highest glory of a human ruler that those under his government had been delivered from bondage, and enfranchised by what he had done and suffered. This is the profound meaning of the song of the redeemed which St. John heard: "Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honor, and glory, and blessing."¹ "For thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation; and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests: and they reign upon the earth."²

¹ Rev. v. 12.

² Rev. v. 9-10.

As I studied, awhile ago, the face of Christ in Da Vinci's painting of the Last Supper at Milan, I thought I was gaining a fresh view of His glory. It is, I think, the saddest face I ever saw. It is the sadness of deep compassion. We read in the gospel that as they were at the table "Jesus was troubled in the spirit, and testified and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me."¹ The artist has fixed upon the scene at that moment as the subject for his canvas. Every disciple was startled as by an electric shock when He said that, but the whole heart of the Saviour was moved, in view of the sin and the ruin of the disciple who had already sold himself to do this deed. And yet, in the sadness of that face, there is no suggestion of weakness. It is not the face of a conquered man. With the sorrow there is blended a dignity that gives infinite weight to His compassion, so that you feel that He was consciously superior to all the circumstances about Him. He was bearing our sins, and the shadow of the cross was falling upon Him, but even then He was plainly the Master and Lord.

This is our Lord and King; the Son of God, and yet the Son of Man, tempted as we are, yet without sin: eating with sinners, but "separate from sinners," knowing what was in man, and yet loving sinful men with an infinite love, and laying down His life for them. The disciples saw Him ascend up where He was before. He "sitteth on the right hand of God." On his head are many crowns,—the crown of divinity, and the crown of a complete humanity; the crown of

¹ St. John xiii. 21.

sympathy, and the crown of mercy. I am sure you have learned all this from His own words and from His life, and your sense of His glory must have deepened from your experiences, as you have gone to Him from day to day with your burdens. For He is wont to reveal Himself to the loving and faithful disciple, so that such an one may have a more perfect image of his Redeemer than any artist has ever painted upon his canvas.

If these things are so how loyal we should be, not only to His church, to His cause in the world, but to Him, our Lord and Master. That word loyalty means a great deal even when it stands for the devotion of a citizen to his ruler. But it means more when it stands for the love and devotion of a Christian to his Redeemer. The world has never seen such loyalty as that which great multitudes have shown to Christ. There is nothing in the annals of the world to equal the constancy of the Christian martyrs, who endured, not death alone, but those tortures of the rack and of the fire which have been permitted to test the devotion of so many of the servants of our King.

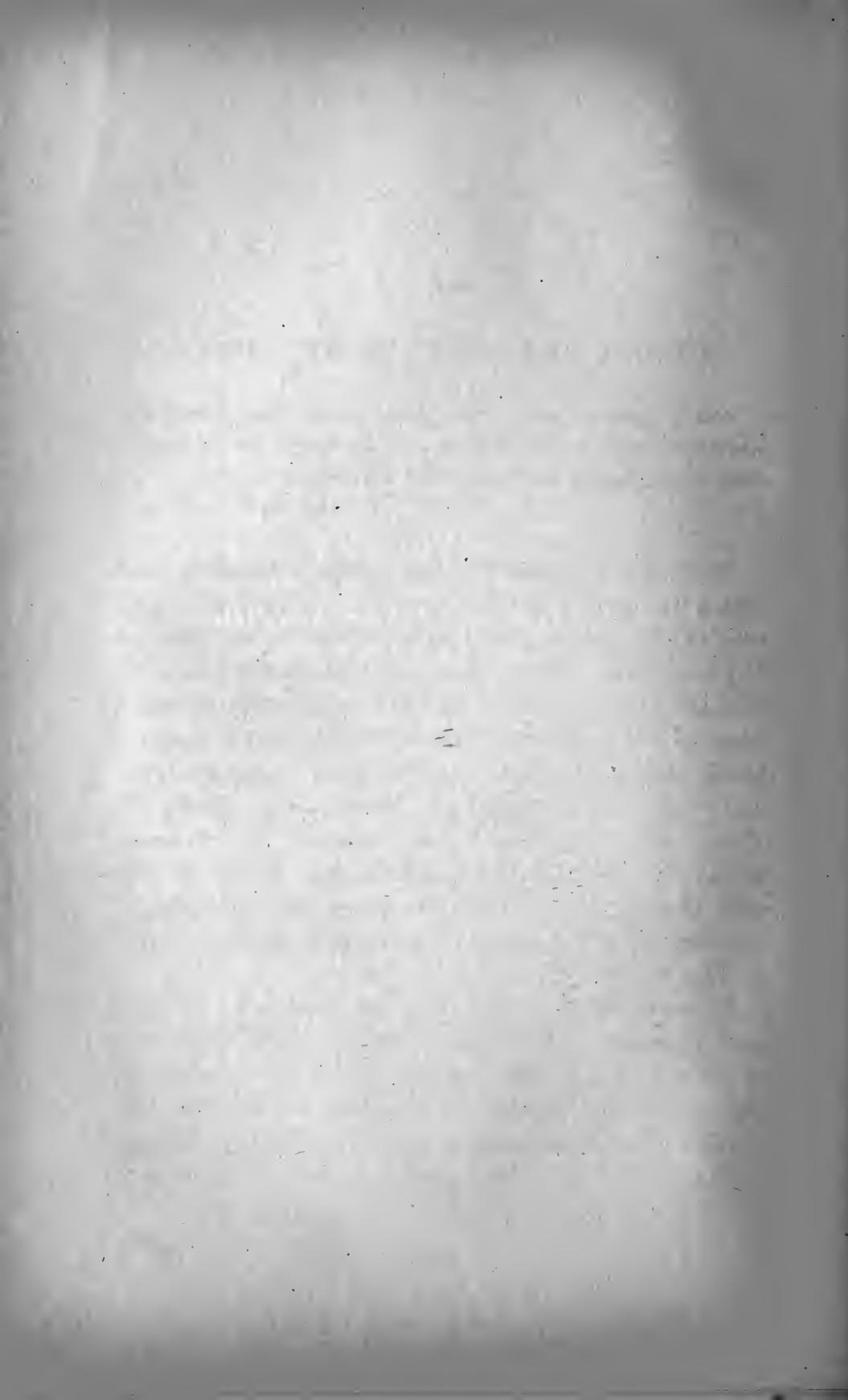
If we are loyal we shall trust His words of promise. We shall live by faith in Him. We shall be obedient to His words. "Ye are my friends," He said, "if ye do whatsoever I command you." "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up the cross, and follow me." "This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."

Our loyalty should not be a constraint. It should be an enthusiasm. It must never count the cost. It gives all, or it gives nothing. It will make us as cheerful as we are faithful. It is the grandest enthusiasm of which we are capable,—the love and devotion of a disciple to his Master and Lord. It has made missionaries and martyrs, and it will continue to make them,—not unwilling, but cheerful and exultant missionaries and martyrs, who go to share His service and His cross as men go to a festival.

The signs of the times indicate that we are on the eve of great events for the Church. The spirit of God is moving among the nations as never before. The Congress of Religions has disclosed to the people in the ends of the earth the beauty and glory of the one religion which is to fill the earth. There is a fresh awakening among Christians, especially young Christians. The opportunities of service are greater, the call is louder. Sectarian divisions are fading away; and the one Church of our Lord seems to be girding itself with strength given from above, to enlighten and save the world for the glory of Christ our Lord.

VI.

CHRIST THE POSITIVE TEACHER.



VI.

CHRIST THE POSITIVE TEACHER.

'And it came to pass, when Jesus ended these words, the multitudes were astonished at His teaching: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.'

ST. MATTHEW vii. 28-29.

ONE who searches the four gospels carefully will find a few texts which suggest the outlines of a picture of our Saviour, as He appeared to the men of His own time. We cannot be mistaken in the opinion that His aspect was kind and gracious, so that mothers brought their young children to Him that He would touch them; the sick and the poor came to Him, and "the common people heard Him gladly."¹ Those who were under the shadow of adversity knew, by an infallible instinct, that his heart was with them. We read in one place that the people "wondered at the words of grace that proceeded out of His mouth."²

There must have been also an impression of perfect sincerity. His face inspired confidence and made a way for Him among strangers. There was also a certain dignity in His bearing and in His speech which commanded respect, while it prevented undue familiarity. His gentleness was as far as pos-

¹ St. Mark xii. 37.

² St. Luke iv. 22.

sible from weakness. His disciples were very near to Him, but they never forgot that He was their Lord and Master. If He drew men to Himself by His mildness and benignity, He commanded their respect by His courage and boldness. "Never man spake like this man."¹ How wonderful it was that He, one man alone, was able with only a scourge of small cords to drive from the temple the money changers,—such money changers as the Jews were, and are to this day. How remarkable that with all the animosity that was kindled against Him, no man laid hands on Him until the last night, and then the rough temple guards were three times overpowered by His simple majesty, and only took Him when He delivered Himself into their hands. So gentle and patient He was, yet so bold and aggressive; at once, the most popular man among the people, and the one most feared and persecuted by the rulers. He was the Prince of Peace, and yet He "came not to send peace on the earth, but a sword."²

In the text we have a statement of the manner of Christ as a teacher, which suggests more than it expresses. One gets a certain impression of Jesus as he reads carefully the Sermon on the Mount, but this impression becomes more distinct when we read directly after that "the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." We have a similar statement three times in the gospels, and the statements refer to different periods in His ministry.³

¹ St. John vii. 46.

² St. Matthew x. 34.

³ St. Luke iv. 32: St. Mark i. 22: St. Matthew vii. 28-9.

He seems to have taught the people as one who had a right to set forth new truth. They were astonished when they saw His fearlessness, and His bold and original methods. He always commanded attention because He spoke as one who was able to impart the highest truths to men.

I.

His authority was shown, first of all, *by His original methods of teaching*. The text brings out the contrast between His way and that of the scribes. The scribes were in bondage, not only to the Old Revelation, but to the old interpretations of the Scriptures, and the traditions of the fathers. So that they were unable to interpret the Scriptures in a free and spiritual manner. They did not expect that there was "more truth to break forth from the Word of God." They had no conception of the progress in the revelation which God had given. In their view everything had been finished in the times of the fathers. This view led them to interpret their Sacred books in a slavish spirit. It inclined them to take narrow views. They were always insisting upon "the mint, and anise, and cummin," while they neglected the weightier matters of the law, — "judgment, and mercy, and faith."¹ They understood neither the deep things of God, nor the deepest wants of the soul of man. So that the result of the rabbinical teaching was a religion of forms covering much hypocrisy and wickedness.

¹ St. Matthew xxiii. 23.

The teaching of Jesus was in sharp contrast with that of the scribes. He spoke as one fresh from the sources of truth. He threw aside the bondage to traditions, and insisted on coming with an open mind and a free spirit to the very heart and core of things. He taught the people with confidence, as though He were conscious of a right to strip from religion the accumulations of past ages, and to lay bare the truth all radiant and glorious, as it came from Him who is the Source of light and of life.

II.

The authority of Christ as a Teacher was shown by His confidence in the truth. He spoke of the truth as real and eternal. It was not a speculation, but the expression of the reality of things, — the same for one man as for another, — for one time, and for all times. It is that which is,

“Not of to-day, or yesterday,
But lives forever, nor can man assign
When first it sprang to being.”¹

There is nothing of skepticism or doubt in the teachings of Christ. He treads upon firm ground. “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”²

Moreover, He showed confidence in the truth as adapted to the minds of men. He took it for granted that the common mind is able to apprehend spiritual truth, for He preached more frequently to the com-

¹ Antigone, quoted by Prof. Fisher in Beginnings of Christianity.

² St. Matthew xxiv. 35.

mon people in the villages of Galilee and of Judea than to the people at the centres of intelligence and culture. He seemed to have more confidence in the common mind than in the educated mind of His time. So He said to the Scribes: "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven."¹ "I thank thee, O Father, because Thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes."²

Especially did our Saviour appeal to the permanent convictions, and moral intuitions of men. He did not deduce the most important truths from processes of reasoning. He never attempted to prove the being of God, or the existence of the spiritual world. He assumed these truths as well known. His effort was to bring men into close personal relations with God as His children, and to bring them under the influence of His holiness and love. He knew the power of conscience and the natural yearnings for immortality, and He sought to lay hold on men by means of their moral sentiments and their spiritual aspirations, and to bring them into fellowship with God. He used the truths that are well known, to lead to the apprehension of the truths that are less known. He frequently used the common relations of men in this life to suggest something of their relations to God. He spoke of earthly things that He might help them to apprehend heavenly things.

"What man is there of you who, if his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? If ye then, being

¹ St. Matthew xviii. 3.

² St. Matthew xi. 25.

evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"¹ So, from your love for your children, learn God's readiness to answer the requests of His children.

The Kingdom of heaven is as when a man "going into another country, called his own servants and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one: to each according to his several ability. . . . Now after a long time, the lord of those servants cometh and maketh a reckoning with them."² So, from these relations which are perfectly familiar in the business of men, He set forth the principles on which God will proceed in respect to the duties which men owe to Him. He appealed also to the sense of ill-desert that men have, and taught that He was the Saviour of sinners; and that the great Father will welcome all such as come back to Him, even as an earthly father, seeing his prodigal son, when he is a great way off, will run and fall on his neck, and kiss him, and put on him the tokens of his forgiveness and his love. So the life here is used to suggest the life there; earthly things are made to teach us heavenly things; and duty to men shows us our duty to God. The earthly home suggests the mansions in the Father's house.

This was His manner of teaching. There is nothing in the gospels more wonderful than the confidence with which the Saviour presented the truth to the people. He employed no artifice. He sought no adventitious helps. He took no pains to solicit

¹ St. Matthew vii. 9-11.

² St. Matthew xxv. 14-20.

the influence of the men of learning and eloquence. He selected His disciples from among the plain people. He did not found an Academy or write a book, or even organize a church. Like Socrates, who refused to commit his teachings to writing, saying, "I prefer to write on the hearts of living men," Christ trusted entirely to oral discourses. He went about among the people teaching the truth concerning God, and the way by which we may please Him; sowing beside all waters; teaching all sorts and conditions of men, even publicans and sinners, the profane and the outcasts; using the simple and homely methods that would convey the truth most clearly to the common men who resorted to Him. He forbade His disciples to use any other means besides the truth. "If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight."¹ "Put up the sword into the sheath."² "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass, in your purses; nor scrip for your journey; neither two coats; neither shoes, nor yet staves."³ But "go ye into all the world," go fearlessly, go confidently, "and preach the gospel to every creature;"⁴ simply preach the truth; "and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."⁵

Let me contrast this reliance upon the truth as a reality, with the philosophy of unbelief, which is so often put forth in an age of unbelief. We have teachers who give us "Guesses at the truth," speculations about the truth; vague conjectures in respect

¹ St. John xviii. 36.

³ St. Matthew x. 9-10.

² St. John xviii. 11.

⁴ St. Mark xvi. 15.

⁵ St. Matthew xxviii. 20.

to the truth. There are some who imagine that it is better to be seeking the truth than to know the truth. It is common to quote one of the sayings of Lessing, that if he were offered the choice between the truth as a present possession and the opportunity to search for the truth all his life, he would choose the latter. But why so? If the truth be worth seeking all one's life, why is it better to seek it than to have it? Why, indeed, should one seek it if it is better not to possess it? Why spend one's life in quest of that which it is better not to gain?

A saying of Tennyson's is often quoted as implying that doubt, if honest, is better than faith;

“There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.”¹

But the meaning of the poet is not that doubt is better than faith. He was himself possessed of a clear and steady faith which he prized above all other things. Honest doubt is better than the pretence of faith, just as anything honest is better than anything dishonest. But doubt, at the best, is only negative,—preparative—while the soul craves that which is positive,—that which satisfies its longings,—the true bread of life. Mr. Tennyson goes on to say of his doubter,—

“He fought his doubts, and gathered strength,
He would not make his judgment blind,
He faced the spectres of the mind
And laid them: thus he came at length
To find a stronger faith his own.”

¹ In Memoriam xcv.

Our great Teacher never mocked the expectations of men with vague surmises and questionings. He taught that over against the inquiries of earnest men there is a real objective truth which is the bread of life. "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life," He said.¹ "To this end was I born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."² He said again: "If ye abide in my word, . . . ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."³

III.

The authority of the great Teacher appears in *His definite and positive statements of truth*. He never teaches that it is of little consequence what men believe. For our religion rests upon certain great facts, and it is of the first importance for us to be sure of these facts.

Take as an example of His method, the teaching in respect to the being of God. You can give twenty reasons, perhaps, to prove that there is no God but nature. Another can give twenty reasons to prove that there is a living God who is the Author of nature. Did Christ teach in that way? Did He speculate upon the matter as though there were any uncertainty about His existence? Instead of that, Jesus said: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; how sayest thou, show us the Father?"⁴ "I and the

¹ St. John xiv. 6.

³ St. John viii. 31-32.

² St. John xviii. 37-38.

⁴ St. John xiv. 9.

Father are one.”¹ “God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”² “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”³ Above all, did He illuminate the truth concerning God when He said: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have eternal life.”⁴ That is not the manner of one who is finding his way to the truth step by step, but of one who knows. Whoever will receive His testimony will have no doubt that there is one God, spiritual, good, and true, and that He loves the world.

If a man die shall he live again? Who can tell us? We have had no experience of death or of what lies beyond. Human reason gives no certain answer. Some wise men have found it hard to believe in immortality. But Jesus answered the question not only by His words, but by His sublime act. He said, “He that believeth on me, though He die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me, shall never die.”⁵ He told His disciples that He should rise again; and on the third day He did come forth from the tomb, and showed Himself alive unto His disciples “by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days.”

Can God forgive sin? Some say yes; others say no. I do not think any one can find out by his own inquiries. I can give as many reasons why a holy

¹ St. John x. 30.

³ St. Matthew xxii. 32.

² St. John iv. 24.

⁴ St. John iii. 16.

⁵ St. John xi. 25-26.

God should not forgive sin, as another can give to show that He can do so. But the Master did not give any reasons. He did not discuss the question. He settled it by saying to a man: "Thy sins are forgiven;"¹ and then He wrought a miracle to show that He had power on earth to forgive sins. The thing was done, and there was an end of questioning, if you will receive His testimony. And since God can forgive sin, He made it the great purpose of His teaching to induce men to come to Him with their burdens and their guilt, and obtain a free remission for His sake.

There is a great practical question as to prayer. Some inquire whether it is of any use for men to pray. Does God hear our prayers? Can we expect that God will interfere in any case with natural processes in answer to the prayers of His children?² It is very common, at this time, to say that the only benefit of prayer is its reflex influence upon the person who prays. But the great Teacher expressed no doubt in respect to prayer. He lived a life of prayer. He taught His disciples to pray. He said: "Therefore I say unto you, All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them."³ "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."⁴ He also said: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will and it shall be done unto you."⁵ There is no longer any

¹ St. Mark ii. 5.

³ St. Mark xi. 24.

² See The Forum, May, 1897, 351.

⁴ St. Matthew vii. 7.

⁵ John xv. 7.

question in regard to the efficacy of prayer, for those who receive the teachings of Christ.

Another question relates to the dealings of God with men in the future life. Will He punish those who refuse the offers of His grace, and die without repentance? Christ did not discuss this question, as though He needed to find His way to the truth; but announced the solemn fact, “Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.”¹ There is then a sin unto death. In summing up the results of the final judgment, our Lord said: “These shall go away into eternal punishment; but the righteous into eternal life.”²

There is no need to multiply illustrations of this positive method of the great Teacher. They lie on the surface of the four Gospels, and he who runs may read them. He shows unlimited confidence in the truth, and in Himself as the Divine Teacher of men. Observe the perfect independence of this Teacher. He stands alone on a height unapproachable,— the most solitary of beings; the one infallible Teacher of Divine things. The wise men of the nation dissent from Him, but His confidence does not waver. The nation turns against Him, but He does not hesitate. His disciples forsake Him, but in the supreme hour He says: “Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.”³

¹ St. Matthew xii. 32.

³ St. John xviii. 37.

² St. Matthew xxv. 46.

IV.

The authority of Christ also appears *in the claim which He constantly made that men should obey the truth which He was giving them.* The truth, in His use of it was intensely practical. It was such that the knowledge of the truth placed men under obligation to follow it. "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, is like unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock;" and whosoever "heareth these words of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand."¹ The truths He teaches are vital. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."²

There are many things that are true that have no relation to character. It does not make one a better man to know that two and two are four, or to comprehend the demonstrations of Euclid, or the correlation of forces. But it does tend to make us more serious to know that we are immortal. It gives us hope and courage to learn that God loves us. It strengthens every moral feeling to know that we are responsible to God. Our whole life will be elevated if we come under the influence of the pure and blessed life of Jesus, who has redeemed us.

The great Teacher presents these truths as the means for our salvation. He would save us through the truth, — truth which consists of certain simple statements of fact, which we receive on His authority,

¹ St. Matthew vii. 24-26.

² St. John vi. 63.

but which we find to correspond with the suggestions of our own spiritual nature. These truths are of such a kind that if we yield ourselves to their direction they will guide us to a spiritual life with God.

He claims a complete obedience. He will not accept a divided service. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon."¹ He requires us to forsake all and follow Him, even though we may have to bear the cross. "He that loveth father and mother more than me cannot be my disciple." "For whosoever would save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, shall find it."²

This statement of the manner of our Lord's teaching *shows us the inner spirit of our religion. It is the most positive of religions.* It meets us with a statement of the great facts concerning God and man, redemption and salvation, and it calls for our obedience. It does not permit us to linger in the borderland of doubt. It does not allow us time for the luxury of unbelief. It blames us if we "halt between two opinions." It presses us through our consciences and our affections. It sets before us our sin and guilt, and it appeals to our sense of duty, and to our desire for peace and blessedness in the life to come. It teaches us that "in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved."³

A religion must be positive that is to give peace to the human soul. We find ourselves in existence, but we cannot tell of ourselves whence we came, or

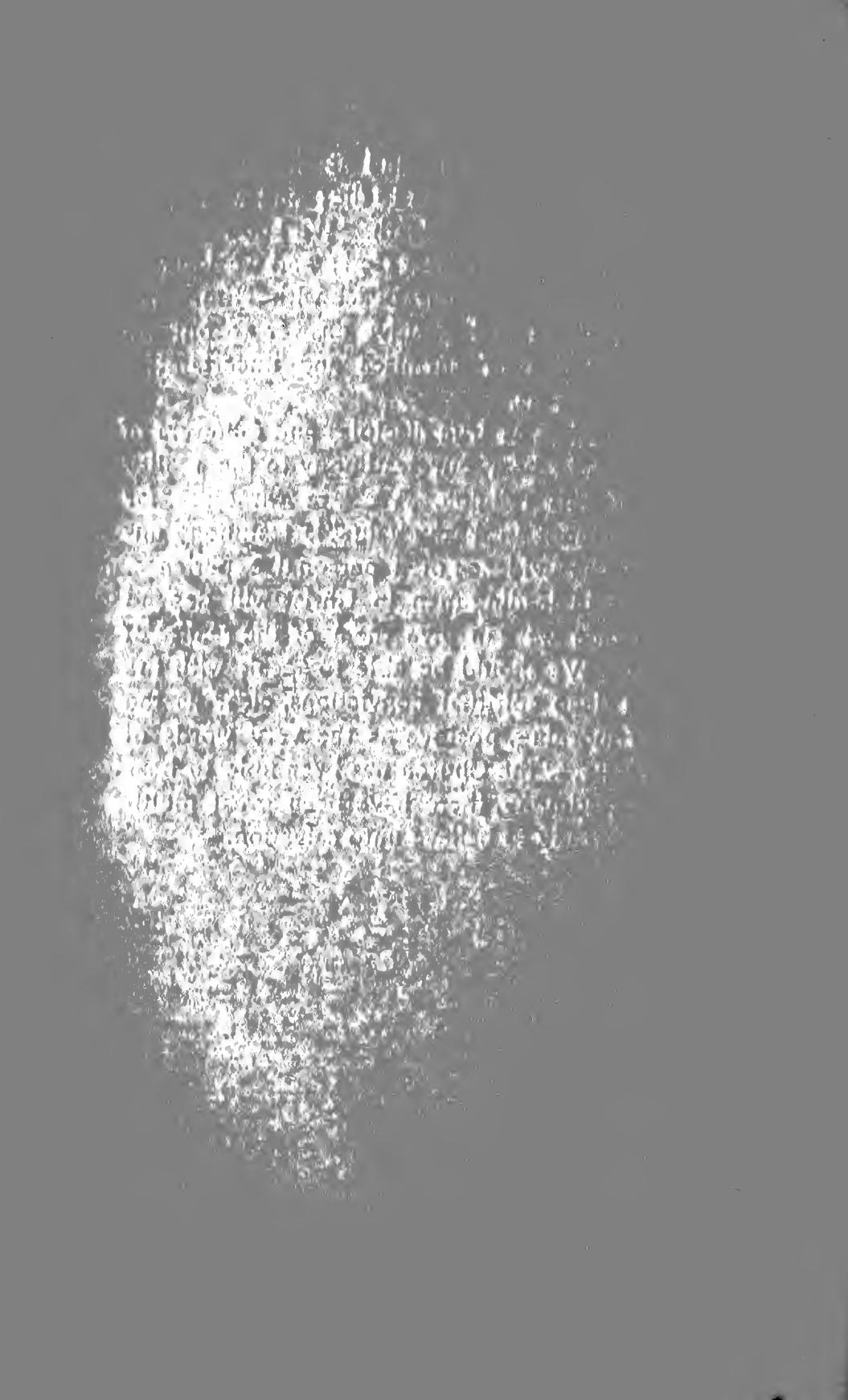
¹ St. Matthew vi. 24.

² St. Matthew xvi. 25.

³ Acts iv. 12.

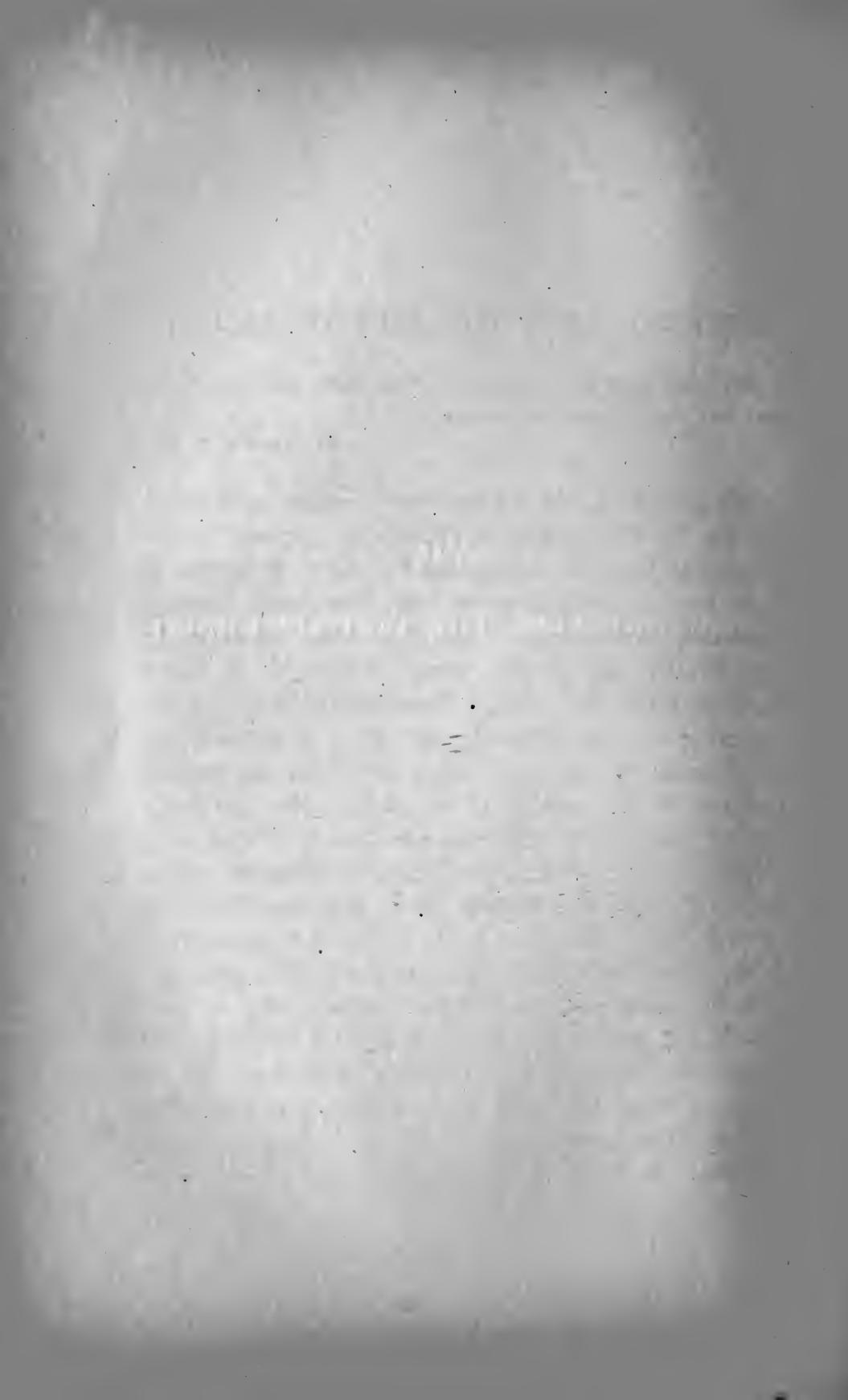
whither we are going. We stand at the open grave, and we know that we are soon to die; and we inquire what there is for us after death. We know that we are sinful, and we fear to meet God; and we long to know how we can make our peace with Him. We must have a direct and positive answer to our inquiries. A religion of surmises and uncertainties would only mock us.

It is our mission, as true disciples and followers of the Lord Jesus, to bear our testimony to the reality and power of this religion. We are witnesses for Christ. We cannot bear any valuable testimony unless we have the evidence of a personal experience. Our influence in leading men to Christ will depend on the evidence we can give them of the reality of this religion. We should be able to speak with the authority of deep spiritual convictions, clear as the light of morning, positive as the very words of Christ. Whenever the Church has been able to bear this positive testimony, there have been great multitudes of men ready to believe unto salvation.



VII.

ETERNAL LIFE, THE GIFT OF CHRIST.



VII.

ETERNAL LIFE, THE GIFT OF CHRIST.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life.

ST. JOHN X. 27-8.

WE read very often in the New Testament of “eternal life.” The phrase is especially frequent in the Gospel of St. John, and in his Epistles. It seems to have been a favorite term with him; and, what is especially noteworthy, when John uses the term, he is generally quoting the words of Christ. It was a favorite term with Him. Another thing to be observed about the term eternal life is this: that our Lord seems to have used it to express the one leading purpose of His mission to this world. He had come among men not as a philosopher, or as a teacher of science, or of politics, or of a new civilization, but to impart to men that which He is continually calling eternal life. Thus we read, in the 3d chapter of John, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”¹ We read in another passage, that the Son of man was to be lifted up from the earth, that “whosoever believeth, may in Him have eternal life.”² Putting these texts together, the teaching is very significant. God’s love

¹ St. John iii. 16.

² St. John iii. 15.

for the world has this for its final purpose, that lost men may have eternal life; and the death of our Saviour on the cross was to secure eternal life for those who believe. This purpose of His redemptive work is kept always in the foreground. He is the Lord of life. In Him was life in very deed. So that He was able to give eternal life to men. He left His seat of glory, and became incarnate in order to be able to offer this life to men. He would not shun the cross. He drank the cup of sorrow, in order that He might give eternal life to as many as should believe on Him.

Let us consider this special gift of eternal life.

I.

First, what is eternal life?

The word eternal stands for that which is endless, if any word does. It is the word used to set forth the duration of the being of God, as well as that of the soul of man.

The word life is used in the Bible as the opposite of death. God said to Adam, "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."¹ Death was to be the punishment of his disobedience. The threatening was fulfilled in the moral and spiritual death of our first parents,— perhaps also in their physical death. In the New Testament we read that "through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin."² We read in various places that men, in their natural state, are "dead" in trespasses and sins. That is the way in which the New Testament speaks of our condi-

¹ Gen. ii. 17.

² Rom. v. 12.

tion by nature. We are said to be dead in sin. So that the life which Christ came to give us, is the opposite of this spiritual death. He came among men to give a new spiritual life to as many as should believe on Him. "And you did He quicken," that is, make alive, "when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins, wherein aforetime ye walked, according to the course of this world."¹ This new life is called eternal, to indicate its duration.

It follows that the term eternal life does not, by any means, signify the same thing as immortality. The Bible teaches very clearly that all men are immortal. Immortality seems to have been a part of the image of God which was given to man at his creation. The common and instinctive beliefs of men have included the assurance of immortality. Pagan literature, as well as Christian, is full of the hope and assurance of immortality. Our Saviour speaks as confidently of the continued existence of wicked men, beyond this life, as He does of the continued existence of good men. So that, it is plain He did not come to the world to give immortality to men, but to give that which would make immortality an infinite blessing. All men are, by nature, immortal, but these same men need that eternal life which our Saviour came to impart. "My sheep," He says, "hear My voice, and they follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life." We read in the Epistle of John, "No murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."² But every murderer has an immortal soul abiding in him. We are all immortal, but we all need this gift of eternal life.

¹ Ephesians ii. 1-2.

² 1 John iii. 15.

This gift is not the mere prolongation of our present existence. That would not be a true salvation. To live forever, as we are now, — with our weaknesses, our infirmities of temper, our narrow views and sympathies, our evil habits of thought and feeling, our jealousies and ambitions, disappointments and failures, with a sense of sin and of guilt, — an immortality such as this would not be the eternal life which our Saviour came to give to those who follow Him.

Eternal life is His special gift. It is added to the old life. It is the result of a special divine work in the soul, which makes one a child of God. It is not developed from the old life. It is a new life, which makes one a new man in Christ Jesus. Our Saviour said : “I give unto them eternal life.” And again He said, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life.”¹

II.

How do we secure this gift of eternal life?

It comes to us by faith, for we read: “For this is the will of my Father, that every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on Him, should have eternal life.”² This “believing on Him,” is much more than the assent to a creed. It is the religion of the heart, not that of the head, which brings us eternal life. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life.” It

¹ St. John iv. 14.

² St. John vi. 40.

is that belief in Christ which includes a loving trust in Him, and which brings us unto personal union with Him, so that we follow him: it is this which brings to us eternal life.

There is a reason why we receive the gift of eternal life through believing. It is not possible to receive it otherwise. For it is by believing in Christ that we come into sympathy with Him, and with the spirit of His life. We do not gain the best influences even from a human teacher and guide, unless we first believe in him, and give ourselves up to his guidance. It is through a complete sympathy between him and us that our nature is opened to the best things he has to impart. Even so, when we open our hearts to the influence of the Redeemer, and enter into the spirit of His life, and become His followers, we are prepared to receive the gift of eternal life. "We love, because He first loved us."¹ "He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love."² When we have eternal life, we are brought into such intimate relations with Him, that we know Him, and our "fellowship is with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ."³ It is only as our hearts are given to Him that we can possibly enter into this intimate communion with Him.

III.

What are the signs and proofs that one has the gift of eternal life?

"The witness is this," says the apostle John, "that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in his

¹ 1 John iv. 19.

² 1 John iv. 8.

³ 1 John i. 3.

Son. He that hath the Son, hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God, hath not the life.”¹ If then we are united with Christ by a living faith, we may be sure that we have eternal life. So we read in the next verse: — “ These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life; even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God.” This is the inner light, and token that we have eternal life, — that we believe on the Son.

There are other tokens. “ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.”² This is a test which we can easily apply to ourselves. So there is the broader test: “ By their fruits ye shall know them.”³ Or we have this: “ He that soweth unto his own flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth unto the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap eternal life.”⁴ Best of all tests is this, which our Lord has given us: — “ Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth Him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment but hath passed out of death into life.”⁵

IV.

We come next to the question: — *As to the beginning of eternal life; when do we have it?* Is it ours at the present time, or is it reserved for the life to come?

It is natural to think of our life in this world as separated very far from the life hereafter. The classic

¹ 1 John v. 11-12.

³ Mat. vii. 16.

² 1 John iii. 14.

⁴ Gal. vi. 8.

⁵ St. John v. 24.

religions taught that the home of departed souls was far away: in some place difficult of access; — under the world, or on some mountain summit, or some island in remote seas, or on some planet or star. The pagan religions of modern times have held to this notion of the ancients of a complete separation between life in this world, and the life beyond, and of a distant and almost inaccessible Heaven.

But this was not the tendency of the teaching of Christ. As He brought God nearer to men, as an object of personal love and of trust, so He brought the other world near to men. It is the “Father’s house.” The angels are interested in our lives, and they rejoice when we come to repentance. The law of sympathy is the law of the universe and we are one family, in earth and heaven. He “brought life and immortality to light in the gospel.”¹ He brings the life here into close connection with the life there. He had Himself just come out of the spiritual world. He was among men as one who had grown familiar with that world, and who was able to unfold its mysteries.

He spoke of the gift of eternal life as a present gift. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life.” It is not, I will give eternal life: but now, while they are following me, I give unto them eternal life. He said also, “he that believeth hath eternal life.” He has already received it when he believes. “He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood hath eternal life.”² To eat the flesh, and drink the blood of the Son of man is evidently an expression to be understood not

¹ 2 Tim. i. 10.

² St. John vi. 54.

in a literal, but in a figurative sense, and it denotes a reception by faith of the Crucified One, whose body was broken for us, and whose blood was shed for the remission of our sins. So that the words teach us in another form that those have eternal life, who truly receive the Saviour who has borne our sins in His own body.

I find the same meaning in the other passages that have been quoted. "No murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." It is not, no murderer shall inherit eternal life, but no murderer hath this life *at the time when he is a murderer*. But "he that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath eternal life." In quite another form our Saviour said to the woman of Samaria, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life."¹

Without quoting the other texts which confirm this teaching, these are enough to show that eternal life is the present possession of the true believer. Too long we have thought of it as future,—a gift to be imparted after we leave this world. But in fact, we have eternal life abiding in us now, if we are true believers and followers of Christ. "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that if He shall be manifested we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him even as He is."² We are the sons of God not in that general sense in which all men whom

¹ St. John iv. 14.

² 1 John iii. 2.

He has created are sometimes said to be His sons, but in that special and profound sense in which those who have been renewed by the Spirit are the sons of God. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."¹ Our names are already in the book of life; our treasures are "laid up in heaven;" "we have now the spirit of adoption whereby we cry Abba, Father;"² "we have the Spirit witnessing with our spirits that we are born of God," so that we live "as seeing Him who is invisible," and we are running our race "looking unto Jesus the Author and Perfecter of our faith."³

V.

If, then, we have eternal life abiding in us, *what is the relation of our life in this world to the life beyond?*

It will not answer to say that there is no difference between the present and the future. Our Saviour always spoke of the other life as a great advance upon the present. He did not seek to break down the separating wall between the life here and the life there. He brings Heaven very near, but never so near as to make it common. He never lays aside the reserve which the writers of the Bible always use when they speak of Heaven. He said to His disciple, "Whither I go thou canst not follow me now."⁴ There must be a time of patient waiting for the promised inheritance. When He ascended to Heaven, "a cloud received Him out of the sight"⁵ of

¹ Rom. viii. 1.

³ Heb. xii. 2.

² Rom. viii. 15.

⁴ St. John xiii. 36.

⁵ Acts i. 9.

His disciples. It is not the will of God that we should look beyond that cloud, so long as we are in the flesh. If we knew too much of Heaven we should be unfitted for our duties here. The Apostle Paul had been caught up into the third heaven, which he calls "Paradise," and he was in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart even from the abundant labors of the Apostolic church, that he "might be with Christ."¹ We have none of us been caught up into Paradise, but it is our privilege to have spiritual experiences such that we can know something of the blessedness of the redeemed. President Edwards recorded in his journal that he had often enjoyed such intimate communion with God that he could not conceive of anything higher even among the saints in Heaven.² I am quite sure that it is the privilege of those who share the gift of eternal life, to live so near to the spiritual world that it will cease to seem strange or unfamiliar to them. It is not far away, but near at hand.

It was this assurance of eternal life as a present possession, which gave to the martyrs their cheerful constancy in the presence of death. It was this assurance which led the primitive Christians to call their places of burial "Cemeteries," that is, "Chambers of rest." One is impressed in going through the Catacombs at Rome with the emblems which are carved upon the doors of the tombs. They are emblems of immortality; suggestions of confident faith in the love and grace of the Good Shepherd. The

¹ Phil. i. 23.

² Life of Edwards in his works. His private journal.

hymns which those Christians sang, their prayers, and the early homilies express the same faith.

There is a striking inquiry recently published of a great Englishman, who said, in the near view of death, "When my Father opens the door, and wants Henry Edward Manning within, shall not the child be waiting on the step?"¹

You recollect that poem of Mr. Tennyson entitled, "Crossing the Bar:" —

" May there be no sadness of farewell
When I embark;
For tho', from out our bourne of time and place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have cros'd the bar."

We have also a later expression from the same poet in the lines "On the Death of the Duke of Clarence," addressed to the royal mourners: —

" The bridal garland falls upon the bier,
The shadow of a crown that o'er him hung
Has vanished in the shadow cast by death.
. . . Yet be comforted,
For if this earth be ruled by perfect Love,
Then after his brief range of blameless days,
The toll of funeral in an angel ear
Sounds happier than the merriest Marriage bell.
The face of Death is toward the sun of Life,
His shadow darkens earth; his truer name
Is onward. No discordance in the roll
And march of that eternal harmony
Whereto the worlds beat time, tho' faintly heard,
Until the great Hereafter; mourn in hope."²

¹ Contemporary Review, February, 1892, 191.

² Poems of Tennyson. Latest volume.

I do not know whether it is common in our time for Christians to cherish such views as these of the reality and the nearness of the spiritual world. Life in this world is pleasanter than it was in the ages of persecution. The interests of life are more numerous, life itself is more intense, and it may be that eternal things do not come so near to our minds, do not kindle the imagination as they used to. But for all that, the great realities of spiritual religion are our only enduring hope and inspiration. There they stand, obscured, it may be, by the mists of an Age of Doubt, but still the transcendent realities. Our life here takes hold upon the life to come. We already have eternal life abiding in us if we are truly in Christ. This is only the season of preparation,—the time for the unfolding of spiritual powers, the time of waiting. But that is the time of permanent joy and blessedness. That is the world's great hope. We attain the best things which God has for us by the simple following of Christ. “ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, which hath given them unto me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.”

VIII.

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP.



VIII.

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP.

God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship in spirit and truth.

ST. JOHN iv. 24.

IF God is a Spirit, He is an intelligent Being. He can think, and feel, and act. He can be pleased or displeased. He can grant a request, or refuse to grant it. A spirit is not a mere force, or law. A spirit is a life. A spirit has a will, a heart, a conscience. A spirit is in the fullest sense, a person. We speak of the spirit, in distinction from the body. When we say that God is a Spirit, we mean that He is free from the bondage to matter.

Our Saviour tells us that God is a Spirit, in order to teach us how to worship Him. If He is a Spirit, He can understand our prayers, and our praises, and can accept our homage. He knows whether we worship Him in sincerity. Mere forms and pretences of worship do not please Him. If God is a Spirit, then “they that worship Him, must worship in spirit and truth.”

I.

What then is true worship?

It is the *homage* which the lower pays to the higher. It springs partly from a sense of dependence. It is the effort of weakness to lay hold upon strength. It

is an instinctive movement of the human towards the divine. I have never found any evidence that worship was ever learned. It has always gone up from man to God.

Worship is *aspiration*. What we become will depend upon our aspirations. If we climb towards that which is only a little higher than we are, we shall not rise far above the earth. Those who make pleasure, or riches, or honor the chief objects of life, cannot expect to become large, and generous, and spiritual. If we have no God but nature,—the forces and laws which science enables us to study,—if we cannot look beyond the rising and the setting of suns, and the fixed laws of the natural world,—then we can never mount towards the realm of the spiritual. Why then should we limit our aspirations? We start with a little knowledge:—let us seek for more. We know something of the beings who are near us:—shall we not extend our acquaintance to include those who are further away? Shall we not seek to know God, that we may become like Him?

True worship is *the expression of our thoughts, and emotions towards God*. There must be thought. There must be emotion. There must be expression. It may be in words. It may be in music. It may be by a look or a gesture. The dumb can worship God. The prisoner in his chains can worship. The little child can worship. The angels always worship. Worship is a natural duty, for God is our Maker, and He is infinite in His perfections. It is our highest privilege. It is the means by which we become partakers of the Divine nature. It does more than knowledge, or cul-

ture, or society to lift us above that which is sordid and mean. It makes us familiar with the highest truths. So that worship rests us after the labors of the week, by bringing us into a new range of thought and of feeling.

Worship should be *humble and reverent*. "The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him."¹ Worship must be sincere. We should not be like those who "draw nigh unto God with the mouth, and honor Him with the lips, while the heart is far from Him." We should be solicitous about the way in which we come to worship. "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer."² We should come with penitence for our sins, for "the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."³

True worship will also be *intelligent*. Ignorance is not the mother of devotion. "Ye worship, ye know not what," said our Lord; "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship," said St. Paul to the Athenians, "Him declare we unto you."⁴ God has revealed Himself in the life and teachings of His Son, and so we may know what we worship. The more we know of God, the better we shall be prepared to worship Him in spirit and truth. Worship is an intense personal act. The whole soul goes out to God in petition, and in adoration, and praise.

¹ Hab. ii. 20.

² Ps. xix. 14.

³ Ps. xxxiv. 18.

⁴ Acts xvii. 23.

II.

What are some of the reasons why we should worship God?

Because our deepest moral instincts point us towards worship. We cannot go so far back in the history of mankind as to trace the beginnings of worship. As far as we can find any written records worship has had a large place in the life of man. If we grope our way beyond the earliest writings, and beyond the traditions that live in the earliest poetry, we shall find monuments that are connected with worship. It is impossible to tell when men began to worship. So far as we can learn, the practice of some form of worship has come down from primitive times, as one of the things which the voice of God in the soul has taught to men of every race, in every quarter of the world.

Turning next to the *Bible*, we find that men worshipped God when the world was new. We are not told that they were taught to worship any more than that they were taught to eat, or to sleep. We find Abel presenting an oblation of the firstlings of his flock. Noah offered a sacrifice when he took possession of the desolated earth. Abraham built altars and offered sacrifices when he came into the land of promise. So did all the patriarchs. Moses, at the burning bush, put his shoes from his feet, in token of reverence for God. When he made known the words the Lord had spoken unto the people, "they bowed their heads and worshipped."¹

¹ Exodus iv. 31.

God taught his people how to worship. He appointed the times, and the ways of presenting their prayers and sacrifices, and their gifts of treasure. The Psalms were written to express the praises and the confessions of the devout Jews. The temple at Jerusalem was a place of worship, and the people of God were to turn towards it when they prayed. When the Jews returned from the captivity, they rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, and they built synagogues in all parts of their country, as places for the regular worship of God by prayers and praises, and the reading of the Holy Scriptures. In the time of Christ these synagogues were open every Sabbath day for worship. There our Saviour was accustomed to worship while He dwelt at Nazareth, and during His public ministry, wherever He was when the Sabbath overtook Him.

It is very instructive that Jesus went every year to the temple in Jerusalem, at the time of the Passover, leaving for this purpose His work of teaching and of healing,— going the long journeys on foot with His disciples, that he might worship in the house of His Father. On two occasions He drove out those that bought and sold in the temple, saying, “It is written; my house shall be called a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of robbers.”¹

The Apostles also worshipped in the temple and in the synagogues. Paul said in one place, “I went up to Jerusalem for to worship.”² He had left his work among the churches of Macedonia, where he was greatly needed, and had taken a journey of many

¹ St. Matthew xxi. 13.

² Acts xxiv. 11.

hundred miles that he might be at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Peter and John went up to the temple at the hour of prayer. The early disciples preferred to worship in consecrated places, in the temple or in the synagogues. But the worship was much more to them than the place. When they were shut out from consecrated places they used to worship in private houses; and when these were unsafe they went to the wilderness, to the caves, to the catacombs,—to any place where a company of believers could be gathered. Their worship was very simple. The purpose was always to come into communion with God. They read His word together. They sang psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. They united in prayers. They made offerings for the poor saints on the Lord's day. They united on the First day of the week in celebrating the Lord's Supper. Some of the words they used have been preserved. Very early they began to use the Magnificat: "My soul doth magnify the Lord;"¹ and the Benedictus: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He hath visited and redeemed His people."² The Gloria in Excelsis, which we can trace almost to the first century, the Gloria Patri, of the fourth century, and later, the Dies Irae, and the hymns of St. Bernard,—all these show how the religious emotions of devout Christians have gone forth in song. Some of the prayers of the early church are preserved in the ancient Liturgies. Some of the homilies of the early preachers are also preserved, and they are our best models to-day, for their simple earnestness, their

¹ Luke i. 46.

² Luke i. 68.

close following of the Scriptures, and their evangelical fervor.

When the church gained freedom from persecution, and increased in numbers and in wealth, the modes of worship became more formal and stately. The most beautiful and the most costly buildings in the Christian countries of the old world, are the old churches and cathedrals. The genius of the great artists was employed in painting for these cathedrals scenes from the life of our Lord, and from the Old Testament. Whenever the spiritual life of the church has declined the worship has become formal; but the revival of the religious life has always been shown in the revival of true worship: — in the return to simple and earnest prayer, — the singing of hymns by the people, — the reading of the word of God, direct and affectionate preaching, — the devout and reverent use of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Thus pure religion has always led to the worship of God in spirit and truth.

III.

It remains for us to inquire: — *How shall we worship?*

Our Saviour did not give us any definite forms of worship, like those in the laws of Moses. He taught that the form is less important, and the spirit more important. The Jews said that "in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." It had been so under the Old Testament. But Jesus said: "The hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers

shall worship the Father in spirit and truth." Men are not limited to the mountain in Samaria, nor to Jerusalem, nor to any other place. God is a Spirit, and if we worship in spirit and truth, He will accept our worship.

If God be present in every place, then all our life should be a psalm of adoration and praise. Our Lord said, "Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall recompense thee."¹ The most secret place becomes the very gate of heaven, when a devout soul enters into communion with God, and his prayers go up, and answers come back, as the angels went and came on the ladder whose top reached unto heaven. We are taught also that we should worship God with our families, and I cannot understand how any one can neglect to render praise and prayer, from day to day, in his own home.

God has also appointed public worship, and we have the example of our Lord, and of His Apostles to recommend this way of worship. I do not find that our Lord has appointed any special forms of public worship. There is absolutely no evidence, from the New Testament, or from Church History that any one method of worship is of divine appointment. "Let all things be done decently, and in order,"² certainly. Let every part of the service be for edification. Let the Word of God be read. Let there be the service of song in the house of the Lord. Let there be devout prayer. We can easily make out such points as these to guide us in our worship. But

¹ St. Matt. vi. 6.

² 1 Cor. xiv. 40.

we are left free in respect to the method of using them. When the Society of Friends meet on the First day of the week, in their plain and simple places of prayer,—like that in Amesbury, where the poet Whittier used to go;—when they sit in silence until the Spirit moves some brother or sister to repeat passages from the Bible; or to speak a word of exhortation, or of confession, or of prayer; I have no doubt that God accepts their worship. That plain building is no longer merely a Quaker Meeting House. It becomes the house of God, and the very gate of heaven.

When our brethren of the Episcopal Church, unite in worship, in the use of their Liturgy, rich with the litanies and the prayers of the ancient Churches,—with its regular order of lessons from the Bible, with its hymns, and chants;—and when they preach the gospel as they are wont to preach, I am sure they also are accepted, and receive abundant spiritual gifts. And when we, the children of the Puritans, who are intermediate between these extremes;—when we worship, after the manner of our fathers;—in a way that is simple, and free, and reverent; using hymns, and anthems, reading God's word, and chanting the old Psalms, joining in the common prayer; administering the sacraments; and magnifying the office of preaching the word; we also have constant evidence that God accepts this way of worship.

Let me emphasize the truth, that the controlling idea in all our religious services should be the idea of worship. We should not go to the house of God, as we go to a place of entertainment. Still less should we go for display, or for ostentation. Nor should we

go chiefly for intellectual gratification. The characteristic thing is worship. We come together as a Christian people, believing in God, and in Jesus Christ our Saviour; to honor God, and learn to do His will. We call these places of worship Meeting-houses, according to the old idea,—of places where God meets with His people. The great Person here is, not the preacher, nor any one in the congregation: — it is the Infinite Spirit; whom we should worship in spirit and truth.

Not long ago, a very intelligent and cultured Roman Catholic woman was asked, how it was possible for her to go constantly to a church where the worshipers were poor people, and servants,—people whose social position and whose habits were so different from her own. The woman replied: “I never think of that. I go to worship God in His house, and what is it to me if the Lord’s poor are there also?” It may be that Protestants have some lessons to learn from their Catholic neighbors. They go to the church as the house of God. They go to worship, and it may be that their worship is more acceptable to God, than that of some Protestant congregations. We need more than any other thing, a revival of the spirit of worship; of worship like that which finds expression in the Psalms; with their humble confessions of sin: their earnest petitions; and their sincere offerings of praise and thanksgiving.

First, and most important in our worship is *prayer*. We acknowledge the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit. We give thanks for His mercies. We confess our sins, and ask for pardon. We ask for protection, and for grace. It is in the very idea of the common

prayer, that we all unite in the petitions. Why should not each one make the prayer his own, and join, silently, but heartily in the great petitions for pardon, and grace, and salvation?

I have been deeply impressed, while attending the Protestant churches in Europe, with the devout appearance of the congregations. I used often to find myself in a church where a sacred stillness pervaded the assembly, as the minister led our devotions. Nearly all bowed their heads in prayer, as they took their places in the pews. They listened attentively, and they joined in singing and chanting, as though they desired to have a part in the worship. They were in no haste to leave their seats after the benediction. It is easier to preach in England than at home, because English congregations are so attentive, and so responsive.

Next to prayer is *praise*, as a part of worship. This also is for the people. It is in sacred song, as in prayer: when we really worship, we shall seek to express our devotion in simple forms. The simple and ancient tunes which the German people sing in their churches are very beautiful. There is an increasing tendency, in the best churches in this country, and abroad, towards a style of church music that is nearer the wants of the people. The more of reality in the service of song, the less need to multiply tunes, and to give them a highly artistic character. I asked a cultivated German who had spent some years in the United States, why it was that so many were able to join in singing in the German churches. He replied, it is because we use the old hymns, and the old tunes,

and the children are taught to sing them in the day schools.

He was right. The people should be able to join in the service of song, as a great part of the worship of God. To make this a musical entertainment is to desecrate it. Whatever emotions are fitting in the service of prayer, are fitting in the service of praise. Congregational singing is already adopted in the best and most spiritual churches everywhere, for the largest part of the services; and where the people enter into it devoutly, it becomes the most profitable part of public worship. The hymns we sing should be full of adoration and praise. Not all the hymns in our books are adapted to use in worship. Our hymns should not be limited in their range. We need hymns of penitence, hymns expressive of Christian love, of joy and praise, and adoration; — hymns to express all the phases of devout emotion, and experience. Our hymns should be packed with spiritual truth, in lyrical forms.

We can easily enrich our services by giving more attention to rythmical song, or the chant. This has been used much more than choral song in the churches of the ages, and the chanting of the Psalms by the congregation, is the natural way of using them in public worship. Experience has shown that chanting is within the reach of a larger number of people than choral tunes. The fact that many congregations in this country and abroad have learned to chant, shows that it is quite practicable.

Reading the Scriptures is also a part of worship. God's word is better than the words of man, and the

reading of the Bible should have a large place in our services. The minister should read in some regular order, so that in the course of time, all parts of the Scriptures shall be read. The Episcopal Church gives us an excellent example in this respect. Our interest in this part of the service will be increased, if we open our Bibles at the place of reading, and follow the lessons of the day.

Preaching is also a part of worship, else it would be out of place in these services. If the preacher aims at entertainment,—or at instruction in secular matters, he becomes a mere lecturer, and has no place in the church on the Lord's day. Those are the best sermons which help the people to draw near to God, and send them home with a deep sense of God's presence, and a clear knowledge of the way of salvation, and a strong purpose to do His will. If one would preach such sermons, he may well covet the best gifts, of genius, of learning, of literary skill, and of eloquence. No other advocate pleads for so holy a cause. No other speakers have the opportunity to win so transcendent a prize. We do not worship unless we listen to the sermon with a serious purpose. A critical mood, a desire to be entertained, a supercilious spirit,—these cut one off from all real benefit. The usefulness of preaching depends quite as much upon the hearers as upon the preacher. "Take heed how ye hear," said our Saviour. We read in one of the Epistles:—"the word did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those that heard it."¹

¹ Heb. iv. 2.

The Sacraments of Baptism, and the Lord's Supper are the very highest parts of worship: — the one as the sign and seal of our consecration to God, and of the consecration of our children, and the other as the token of our covenant with Christ, and of His covenant with us: — the new covenant in His blood, “shed for many, unto remission of sins.”¹

Last of all, *the benevolent offerings we make are a part of our worship.* From the time of the Apostles, these have had a place in the church. “Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by as God hath prospered him.”² These gifts, which cost us something, may be better tests of our sincerity than the words of prayer and praise. The Lord Jesus sits over against the treasury, and He measures the gifts by the greatness of the love which they show.

Thus we worship God, by prayers, and hymns, and anthems; by the reading of the Holy Scriptures; by the preaching of the Gospel; by the use of the Sacraments; and by the cheerful giving of our substance for the Lord's poor, here, and in the ends of the earth. We assemble in these consecrated places, to meet the Lord, who knoweth our hearts, and to worship Him in spirit and truth. Let us not give the highest place to the intellectual element in the services; or to the artistic element. If we do this, we shall watch the clouds, and the temperature. We shall say, have we not in our own libraries better sermons than our minister gives us?

¹ St. Matthew xxvi. 28.

² 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

We need, in our Congregational churches a revival of the spirit of worship. Every year there are hundreds of young people, who go from us to join other communions, where the element of worship has the leading place in the services of the church.

We need to cultivate the spirit of reverence. We should come here to meet the Lord, in His own House, and to hear from Him out of His word. We should not trip lightly in, as if it were a theatre. We shall do well to bow our heads in prayer, as soon as we come to our pews. We should attend devoutly upon the services of worship. When it is ended, we should not rush from the church as though we were weary of it. We should delight to worship in the morning, and at evening also. For these hours of worship, are the richest hours in our lives. "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand." "Prayers," says an old writer, "are those most gracious and sweet odors, those rich presents and gifts, which are the best means we can use for purchasing all favor at the hands of God."¹

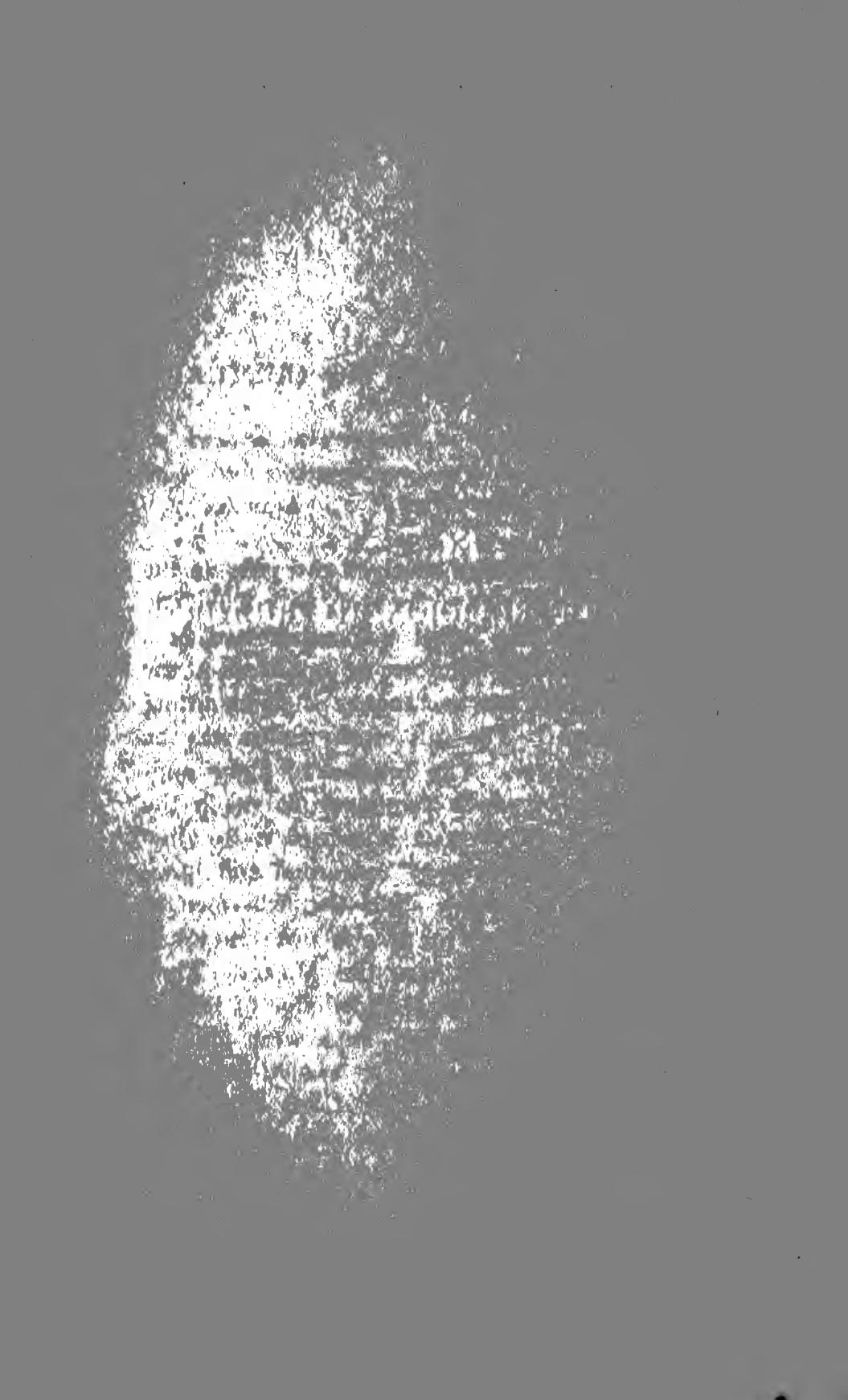
Let us then honor this place as the house of prayer. As we come here from week to week, let it be to seek the blessing of God, in His own temple. And when the years shall have gone by, it will be said of one and another, "this one was born there."²

¹ Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity.

² Ps. lxxxvii. 6.

IX.

RELATION OF RELIGION TO CULTURE.



IX.

RELATION OF RELIGION TO CULTURE.

And as Paul was about to be brought into the castle, he saith unto the chief captain, May I say something unto thee? And he said, Dost thou know Greek? ACTS xxi. 37.

The Apostles of our Lord received two gifts on the day of Pentecost: the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the gift of tongues. If the Spirit was manifested in a bodily form it was not in the form of a dove, as at the baptism of our Lord, but as tongues of flame sitting upon each of them.¹ The gift of the Spirit was the gift of spiritual power. The tongues of flame suggested the means by which they were to reach the minds of men. We have been reminded quite often enough that our Lord selected "unlearned and ignorant men" as His Apostles. But the fishermen of Galilee were not sent out to preach until they had received the best training from the Master. They had some means of acquiring a knowledge of letters, for at least Matthew, John, and Peter were able to write in Greek, and no one of the twelve seems to have been strictly illiterate. Our Lord also chose Saul of Tarsus, a very learned man, who could speak in excellent Greek, even to the fastidious Athenians,

¹ Acts ii. 3.

and He committed to this man of large gifts and acquirements, the leading part in the work among the Gentiles.

God has used civilization and culture as means for advancing His kingdom from the beginning. The Israelites were taught to say, "A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there, few in number . . . and the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us . . . and the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand."¹ But the leader, whom God sent to deliver them, was a man "instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians,"² and he made use of the arts and the culture of Egypt,— the choicest fruits of that old civilization, in founding the Hebrew Commonwealth. When, a thousand years later, God sent the Jews into captivity, they were carried not to a barbarous country, but to Babylon, the centre of a wonderful civilization. The prophet Daniel, their greatest man in that age, was taught in his youth the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans,³ so that he became the chief of the wise men of Babylon, and his countrymen took back to their own land the knowledge and the arts of this great capital of the East.

It is suggestive also of the relation of learning to religion, that when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, wise men from the East came to worship Him, with presents of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.⁴ Religion comes to us from heaven, and it is not the province of science or culture to modify its principles or de-

¹ Deut. xxvi. 5-8.

² Acts vii. 22.

³ Dan. i. 4.

⁴ St. Matt. ii. 11.

termine its ends. The great Apostle did not preach in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; that is, he did not go to Plato or to Aristotle for his doctrines, but to the word of God. Religion is not a part of civilization. It does not depend upon culture. Religion is first and highest, with its own supreme ends. Culture is to bring her gifts and her graces and offer them for the honor and the service of Christ. Culture is not the mistress, but only the handmaid of religion. The gospel, revealed from God, is conveyed to us in human words by the preacher. But the Church has availed herself of the best results of learning. The wise men of the East, and of the West as well, have been bringing the choicest products of genius, — the gifts of learning and eloquence and art and poetry and song, to offer them to the Redeemer.

Let us consider some of the ways by which civilization, and learning, and culture, have been of service to the kingdom of Christ.

I.

In the first place the *religion of Christ has depended very much upon civilization and culture for its extension in the world.* The gospel has not been made known to men by the ministry of angels. As the Redeemer was Himself under the limitations of a human life, so He has left his church subject to many of the conditions of human activity. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels."¹ Christianity is to make its way partly by human means.

¹ 2 Corinthians iv. 7.

One reason why the religion of Christ spread so rapidly is, that the Apostles were able to speak in the Greek language. If they had known only the Hebrew, as Isaiah and Jeremiah did, their influence would hardly have gone beyond Syria. The word of God was written at first for the people of Israel in their own language. But when the time drew near for breaking down the wall of partition between the Jews and the Gentiles, God provided for the translation of the Scriptures into the Greek tongue. The Septuagint version of the Bible was one of the forerunners of the Redeemer. You remember that when the Saviour was crucified His accusation was written in Hebrew and Latin and Greek,¹ because those languages were all in use in Jerusalem, and the gospel was to be given to the nations through all those tongues. But it used especially the Greek, that most expressive and flexible of tongues, which had become, at that time, the common language of cultivated men. It contained the choicest literature which uninspired men have produced. It was the language of art, and it was to continue for centuries, the finest instrument of culture.

The Apostles could speak Greek in Antioch and Alexandria and Athens, and even in Rome. All the books of the New Testament were written in Greek, so that whoever would become an interpreter of the Word, is drawn towards that language, and so brought under the influence of the classic models of speech. It is not too much to claim that He who orders all things in the interest of His church had been prepar-

¹ St. John xix. 20.

ing the language and literature of Greece, by the genius and culture of so many historians and philosophers and poets, to become a fit medium by which the words of the Son of man should be borne, not only over the earth, but down the centuries to the latest time.

Another reason of the rapid spread of the Christian religion in the early centuries was the political organization of the Roman empire. Our Lord came in the age of Augustus. The Roman power had welded together the principal countries of the world, so that the Apostles did not have to make their way among independent and jealous tribes. The great missionary journeys of St. Paul, extending over the provinces of western Asia, and of southern, and perhaps, western Europe, — journeys of many hundreds of miles, show how much the Apostles were assisted by the imperial rule of Rome. To borrow the words of a recent writer, “The world had first to be levelled down into one vast Empire, and the stern legionaries, — those massive hammers of all the earth, — as they paved the great highways from the Euphrates to the pillars of Hercules, were, though they knew it not, fulfilling Hebrew prophecy, — preparing the way of the Lord, making straight in the desert an highway for our God.”¹

So “the earth helped the woman.” The Apostles found a thousand agencies opening the way for them. It was not only the Roman roads, and the approach towards a common language, but the communion of thought among the most enlightened people. The

¹ Culture and Religion. Principal Shairp, p. 42.

Septuagint version of the Scriptures became one of the classics of Alexandria. The Apostles were able to quote from that version. The four Gospels made their way as a part of the literature of the time. Questions relating to the Christian faith were discussed by literary men. St. Paul quotes the heathen poets, and appeals to the Roman law, and he shows an acquaintance with the religion of the Romans. The Letters of Pliny made the new faith known where the Apostles could not go. The influence of civilization tended to raise men above their old superstitions, and so to prepare the way for Christianity. As the early Christian literature grew up, there were a thousand channels by which it could make its way among the more enlightened people of the empire.

The same influences have aided the progress of religion in later times. The Renaissance led to the revival of learning, and this prepared the way for the Reformation. If the art of printing, and the increase in the number of books, gave an impulse to thought, and added to the number of intelligent people, it prepared the way for the work of Luther, and Calvin, and John Knox. Commerce has been a valuable auxiliary of Christian missions. The populous nations of the East, which were shut out for so many centuries from commercial intercourse with the West, are now studying our systems of education, and government, and religion, and they are learning how much the Christian religion has done for the physical well-being of the people, and for their intelligence and morality. It is a fact of great signifi-

cance to the people of India and of Japan that the most advanced science, and the richest literature, and the most liberal systems of government are found among the nations that are Christian. It looks as though the indirect influence of the Christian world, — the light that goes out of itself into all the earth, — was doing more for the spread of Christianity than all the direct influences which the church can use. We are sending our missionaries into all those countries it is true, and they are successful beyond what we could reasonably expect. But it is a great advantage to missions among the eastern races that we can invite these people to be represented in the great expositions of the industry and art of the world: and that we can ask them to send delegates to the world's Parliament of Religions. Intelligence is rapidly disseminated even in eastern Asia. China is now sending her most intelligent and sagacious observers to study the civilization of Europe and America. India is learning, under British rule, the value of schools, and of an intelligent and honest administration of affairs. Twenty-five years ago, President Julius H. Seelye was invited to deliver a series of addresses on religious subjects to educated Hindoos in Bombay, just as, in more recent years, Dr. Joseph Cook, and Dr. John Henry Barrows, and other Christian scholars have been asked to address the same classes of people in India. The attention which these addresses have secured, from great numbers of the most intelligent people in those great centres of influence, shows that the light has penetrated far beyond the direct influence of missionaries. Japan, also, is

awakening from the sleep of ages, and developing a new power, and taking a new place among the nations. Thus every advance in knowledge and the arts of life tends to the extension of the religion of Christ.

II.

In the second place, *religion has depended upon learning and culture for its defence.* St. Paul says that he was "set for the defence of the gospel."¹ If God has given a written revelation to His people, He has left it to their fidelity and skill to preserve the integrity of the revelation, and to defend it from the attacks of skeptical philosophy.

The manuscripts of the Bible, for example, have not been preserved from the errors of copyists. There is need of the most careful and accurate scholarship to secure a correct text. The translators of the Bible have never claimed to be guided by inspiration. The gift of tongues has not been continued since the apostolic age. The church has availed herself of the learning of Christian scholars in order that she may guard the sacred oracles from human corruptions.

Learning has been of service in defending the historical basis of religion. Are the documents from which we learn the life and teachings of Jesus authentic? Have we the complete canon of the sacred books? Have we good reason for receiving the Fourth Gospel? Have we a reliable history of God's revela-

¹ Phil. i. 16.

tion in the Old Testament? What light is the Higher Criticism casting upon these matters? The church cannot safely neglect these questions. If the divine Spirit, dwelling in the church, imparts spiritual life and power to her, the trained intellect of the church has its own important work to do in discriminating the true from the false, and in giving light to those who are perplexed with honest doubt.

Christian scholars have also defended the truth against the attacks of men of science. There is a close relation between the truths which the Bible teaches and scientific truths. The two lines of truth must harmonize, because the God of nature is also the God of revelation. Not that the field of science covers all important truth. "Science has to do," says a recent writer, "with secondary causes. Within that sphere her wisdom is sufficient, but beyond that sphere she does not need to go."¹

It is remarkable that man has lived so long on this earth without learning more of its secrets. Turning his attention, during this century, to natural science, he is surprised at the greatness of his discoveries. As the scientist finds fixed laws everywhere in nature, he is inclined to infer that the reign of law is universal, and that there is no place for freedom and personal responsibility. But this is, at best, only an hypothesis, and it relates to matters that are beyond the field of natural science. For although science is able to examine natural phenomena, and tell us "how the wheels go round," it has no means of finding out, by scientific investigation, what it is that

¹ Dr. Henry Van Dyke, in *The Gospel for an Age of Doubt*, p. 247.

makes the wheels move. It cannot tell what there may be behind the natural phenomena which it studies, which corresponds, as one has said, "to what there is in us, when we make and use a machine, or an instrument: when we plant and cultivate a garden: or when we select and train a noble race of animals. The real question is, whether there is a final cause towards which things work together, and a Supreme Power which guides them to that end."¹ Evolution, for example, is only a process. It cannot account for the origin of things. The process is not the same as the Creator. "The doctrine of Evolution," says Dr. Lyman Abbott, "makes no attempt whatever to explain the nature or origin of life. It is concerned not with the origin, but with the phenomena of life."² If there is a form of Evolution which is atheistic, there is also a form of theistic Evolution, which is as really in accord with all the facts of science as the other.

The church has never declined to meet the questions which are raised by the progress of science. But she has not trusted her enemies to interpret the facts of science, because they cannot gain a full and well-rounded view of truth if they study nature as separate from God. Such investigations have often failed to do justice to the facts which show that there is an intelligent purpose of the Creator directing the processes of nature. It is no wonder that a narrow view of the science of nature should lead to unbelief. It is often needful to appeal to the broader view.

¹ Van Dyke. *The Gospel for an Age of Doubt*, p. 249.

² *The Evolution of Christianity*, p. 5.

The study of language, and of the laws of thought, and of the progress of civilization, and of the history of opinions, is the best antidote to agnosticism and materialism. The Christian universities must speak Greek, and teach Plato, and add a metaphysical training, to the study of the natural sciences. The true method is not "from nature up to nature's God," but from God, the Author of nature, who has revealed Himself in our consciences as truly as in the Bible, down to His works, according to the saying of Kepler, "I read Thy thoughts after Thee, O God."

III.

In the third place, *religion has depended upon learning and culture for its development*. The Kingdom of God is as leaven. Converts from paganism to Christianity have still the habits and modes of thought of pagans, although there is the beginning of a work of divine grace in their souls. Heaven is hardly a place for barbarians. The missionary must teach them to clothe themselves, to erect comfortable dwellings, to gain knowledge, to control their passions, and refine their feelings, and cultivate their tastes. For religion has to do with the whole man. Its final result is character, well rounded and complete, bearing in every part the image of God. It is a narrow culture which develops man only in his relations to this world. The culture which religion favors develops him as a spiritual being. The lower view makes education simply the learning how to get on in the world. But a culture that is truly Christian

has in view not only "the game of life," but the relations we sustain to God, and to the life beyond the present. It aims to elevate the thoughts, and refine the feelings, and strengthen the faith, and to bring one into sympathy with the "First Perfect, and the First Fair." The purposes of a religious culture will be advanced by whatever is beautiful, and true, and good; by all knowledge; by music, and poetry, and architecture, and art. It finds expression in a true Christian civilization. Religion seeks to direct the forces of society in the best way, and to gather into it all those influences that enoble the life of man.

Some one has said that the influences that have moulded our civilization have come from two sources, Athens and Jerusalem. For all that relates to the intellect, to fine form and expression, we are indebted to the Greeks. "The first father," says Principal Shairp, "the Apostle of civilization, was Homer. He was enthroned as the king of minstrelsy, and invested with the office of forming the young mind of Greece to noble thoughts and bold deeds. After his poems were gathered and reduced to writing, it became the first requirement of an educated gentleman to be read in Homer. In his train there followed Hesiod, Pindar, Æschylus, Sophocles. On poetry followed history, oratory, and philosophy. No one who looks back on that marvelous fertility, that exhaustless variety of the rarest gifts of thought, can doubt that this richness was given to Athens that she might be the intellectual mother of the world, that her thoughts might be a possession for all ages."¹

¹ *Culture and Religion*, pp. 36-40.

And so it has come to pass that the thoughts of those old Greeks have entered into the culture of all the nations, and that the art of those sculptors has its representatives in every art gallery.

But for our religious knowledge and culture we go back not to Athens but to Jerusalem. We learn the ways of God to man not from Homer or Thucydides, but from Moses and Daniel and Isaiah, and from Him who spake as "never man spake." It is very plain that the churches that were gathered by the Apostles, within the Roman empire, and which rested with firm faith upon the doctrines of the New Testament, met, on every side, the influences of this old culture, and drew up into themselves its best elements. The Christian mind had to eliminate the pagan elements from literature and art, and yet there remained in its possession all that was finest in the products of genius. The best elements of ancient thought assimilated readily with the truths which Christ taught. And so the church, drawing her life from God, and resting upon His Word, was enriched and beautified by the best products of the human intellect. We can trace this influence in the early literature of the church, — such as the homilies of Chrysostom, and the treatises of Origen and Augustine. We trace it also in the forms of worship, in the hymns and spiritual songs, in the architecture of church buildings, and in the increasing beauty and refinement of the Christian life.

It is not possible to develop the religious life in the best way without taking this generous view of the importance of human culture. We need the "gifts

stored in Athens, and the grace that radiates from Jerusalem." Religion touches every human power, and develops the entire spiritual nature. We are to "add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge."¹ We ought to grow in grace, and in the graces, and to cultivate the "fair humanities," as well as the religious spirit. The church needs to put on her "beautiful garments,"² as well as to put on her strength. Our civilization is not only a development of the principles of the gospel, but a powerful ally in our missionary work. We are to do all things wisely and decently, taking care not to offend the tastes of cultivated men. We do well to magnify the province of Christian art, and to make our sanctuaries as attractive as we can. For the gospel is to win its way to the hearts of men, and it needs all the power there is in the beauty of holiness.

The church has always appreciated this close relation between religion and culture. It has always been the friend of learning. The largest number of the great schools and universities of Europe and America were founded by Christian men, and they have been consecrated to Christ and the church. The highest art of modern times is Christian art, and the finest works in literature — those that have had an enduring influence over men — have been produced by those who invoked the Christian muse.

If these things are so,— if these best and noblest things that have grown up among men,— science,

¹ 2 Peter i. 5.

² Isaiah lii. 1.

literature, culture, and civilization are the auxiliaries of religion, it follows that religion itself is above them all, and the mistress of them all. If science and art have assisted in disseminating Christianity; if they have provided its strong defences against its enemies; if they have aided in its fullest development, then certainly Christianity is worthy the attention of all intelligent and reasonable people.

There is no good ground for the opinion that religion is unworthy of intelligent minds. The Lord our God is a God of knowledge. The life of faith and of devotion is the highest life. The worthiest use for our gifts of genius and culture is the service of God. All our sciences and arts, our literatures and languages, and our civilizations are only too small an offering to our Father in heaven.

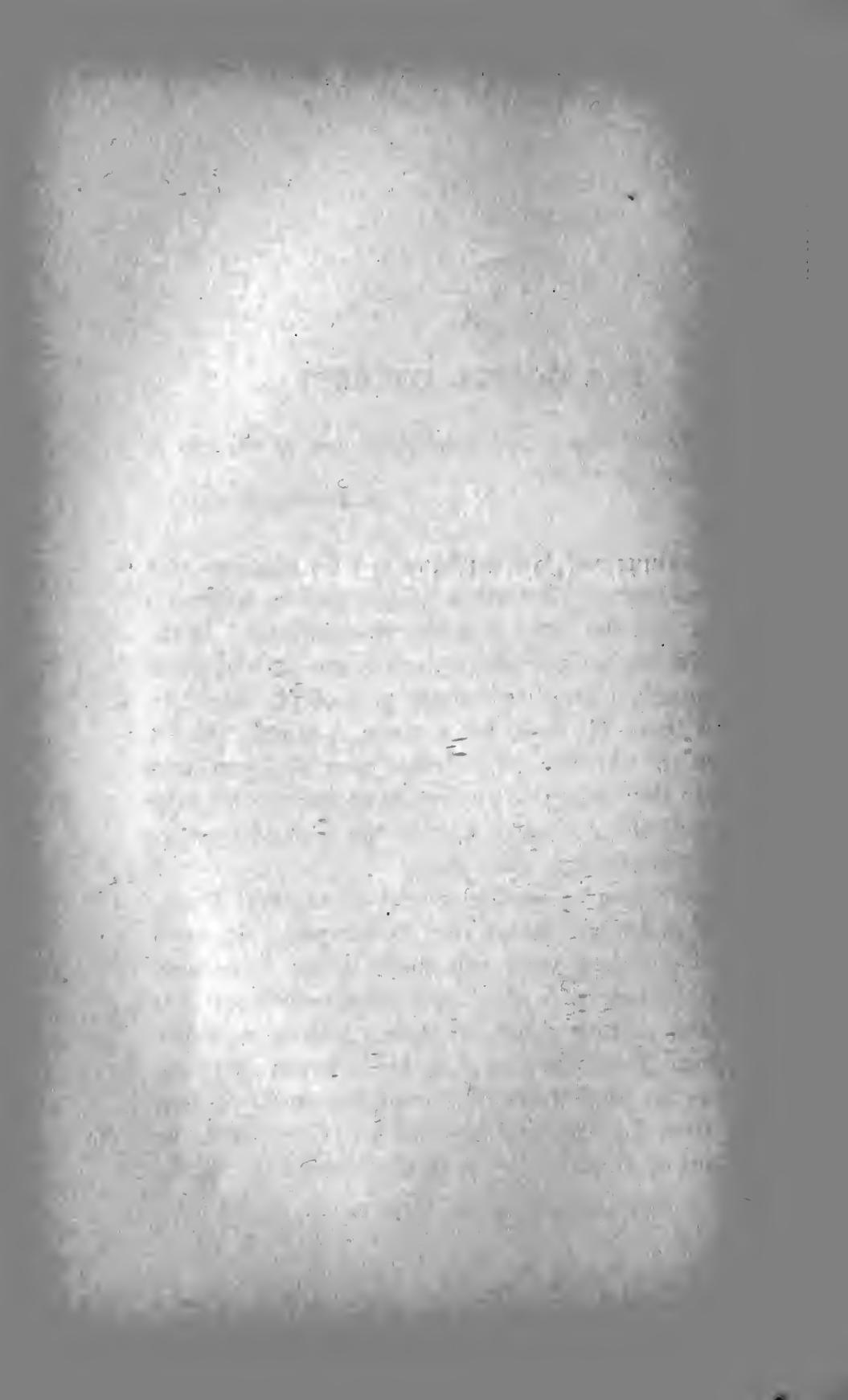
The first place belongs to religion. We are to "seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added unto us." For piety is not, as some say, a grace added to character. It is itself the root and germ of a good character. The religious spirit will find use for all our acquirements and accomplishments; but the beginning is a "life that is hid with Christ in God." They tell us that for the best effect of a painting the light should fall upon it from above. So he who has the true light,—the light that cometh down from God out of Heaven, is prepared to understand the works of God in nature, and to range through the fields of science, and to appreciate at their full value the social and political institutions of men. For it is true, as Milton has taught us, that the finest intellectual products

are gained "by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit, who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and who sends out His seraphim with the hallowed fire of His altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom He pleases."¹

¹ Milton's Prose Works, Bohn's Edition, vol. ii. p. 481.

X.

THE GOSPEL OF REST.



X.

THE GOSPEL OF REST.

And He left them, and went forth out of the city to Bethany, and lodged there.

ST. MATTHEW XXI. 17.

Our Saviour had His Bethany,—His place of rest and refreshment. No other of the places to which He went has the same pleasant associations. Bethlehem, Nazareth, Capernaum, Jerusalem, each of these is inseparably linked with some part of His life. In three of them He had, for a time, a home. But I think we are able to get a clearer view of Jesus as a Friend, in the circle of His friends, to see, what I may almost call the domestic side of the Son of man, in Bethany than in any other place.

The town is not once mentioned in the Old Testament, or in the books of the Apocrypha. It was a small village, less than two miles from Jerusalem, near Bethphage, with which it is often mentioned. It lay on the eastern slope of Mount Olivet, near the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. From Bethany there was an unobstructed view of the steep descent to the river Jordan, and beyond the river were the mountains of Perea.¹ It was in that region that Jesus

¹ Smith's Bible Dictionary. Art. Bethany.

was abiding when the sisters sent their messengers to tell Him that their brother Lazarus was sick.¹ For three days they watched for His coming up that steep ascent. When, at last, He came, Martha and Mary met Him on that same road.

We are not told how Jesus came to be known to the family at Bethany. Indeed, the four Gospels give but an outline of His life, and they leave many gaps. If we had a circumstantial account, like Boswell's Johnson, or a modern autobiography, we should be able to trace various lines of influence, and to understand some references that are now very perplexing.

The earliest reference to our Lord at Bethany occurs in connection with the Feast of Tabernacles, six months before the end of His life.² St. Luke tells us that "He entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at the Lord's feet, and heard His word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving; and she came up to Him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister did leave me to serve alone? Bid her, therefore, that she help me." This family scene, and especially the reproof that Jesus gave to Martha, implies previous acquaintance. But when it began, or how, we are not told.

The next reference to Bethany is some two or three months later.³ Jesus had gone away "beyond the Jordan unto the place where John was at first baptizing." Lazarus was sick, and the sisters sent a messenger to

¹ Stanley. Sinai and Palestine, pp. 186-7.

² St. Luke x. 38-42.

³ St. John xi. 3.

say: "Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick." We read directly: "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." Jesus went and called Lazarus from the tomb, and then returned to "the city called Ephraim, and there He tarried with the disciples."¹

The next visit was six days before the Passover.² Jesus came with a clear knowledge that His hour had come, and He selected the home in Bethany as the place where he would spend the last days. He must have come this time also, up the steep road from the Jordan, and from Jericho. It was the seventh day of the week when He came. And "they made Him a supper, and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him."³ Mary anointed His head⁴ and His feet,⁵ with the precious ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair. The act soothed Him. He accepted it as a tribute of gratitude, and an act of faith. "She hath come," He said, "to anoint my body for the burying." "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in all the world, there shall also this, which this woman (of Bethany) hath done, be told for a memorial of her." The next day, which was the first day of the week (if we follow the order of St. John),⁶ He made His triumphal entry — shall we not say His royal entry — "into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when He had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, He went out unto Bethany with the twelve."⁷

¹ St. John xi. 54.

⁴ St. Matt. xxvi. 7.

² St. John xii. 1.

⁵ St. John xii. 3.

³ St. John xii. 1-16.

⁶ St. John xii. 12.

⁷ St. Mark xi. 11.

After the next day, which was crowded with action and with teaching,¹ we read that "when even was come He went out of the city,"² perhaps to the garden, but more probably this time, also, to Bethany.

The gospels also indicate that it was from Bethany³ that He sent His disciples into the city to make ready the Passover, and as the day began to wear away, He left His refuge and retreat, the last He was to find on earth, and went again to Jerusalem to eat the Passover with His disciples, and then to be betrayed, and condemned, and crucified.

I.

Thus we see that there was a place for Bethany in the life of the Son of man. He had a mission to fulfil. In His very childhood He felt that He must be about His Father's business. His years of public service were very few. He died while He was yet comparatively young. His few years were crowded with labor. It was a very busy, earnest life, full of exhausting services. Each place where He dwelt was the scene of His labors. Many of His mighty works were done in Capernaum and the cities that were near it. Whenever He went to Jerusalem He wrought great miracles, and taught the people from day to day. From the beginning to the end of His ministry His life was intense and crowded.

And yet there were times when He said to His disciples: "Let us go aside into a desert place and

¹ St. Luke xxi. 37.

² St. Mark xi. 19.

³ St. Matt. xxvi. 2-6, St. Mark xiv. 1-3, 12.

rest awhile.”¹ At other times, when He was exhausted with labor, He would leave them, and go away “into a mountain *Himself alone.*”² Sometimes He constrained them to get into a ship, and push out upon the sea, that He might be fanned by the cool breezes of the lake; and then He would sink into the deep sleep that follows exhaustion, after the fevered brow has begun to cool, and the anxious thoughts to give place to tranquil meditations.

These things show us very plainly that our Lord Jesus was a true Son of man. He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. His work told upon a sensitive, human organization. He was often weary, and hungry, and when He lay down at night His rest was sweet, as it is to any tired man. This was a part of what He took upon Himself in taking our nature. It brings Him into relations of sympathy with us, for “He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.”³

II.

But these things in the life of Jesus teach us more than that. He is our only perfect example. If there was a place for Bethany in His earthly life, there should be a Bethany in our lives. His example teaches us *The Gospel of Rest.*

There are two views of life which one meets among good people. One of them has room for Bethany: the other has not.

For there are those who make a virtue of constant work. They are always under pressure. The chief

¹ St. Mark vi. 31.

² St. John vi. 15.

³ Ps. ciii. 14.

end of life is to do things. If they rest it is only to gain strength to work. They take it for granted that toil and care are the only things for which we live. It is with this view of life that people so often say that they do not wish to live after their usefulness is past. They wonder that God so often detains the aged on this earth after their days of activity have gone by.

One with this view of life will be likely to make all things bend to it. Youth is but a preparation for service. Education will be intensely practical. Those studies which do not help our practical work will be passed by. The education which develops the sensibilities, cultivates the imagination, and refines the taste, and improves the moral and religious nature will be discarded.

Periods of rest are thought of as lost time. Men are estimated according to their ability for productive labor. Life comes to be regarded as a period of toil, and man as a creature of superior sagacity and capacity for labor. If they are religious people they have no appreciation of a contemplative Christianity. Their tabernacle must be always moving. They seem to fear lest the rest of Heaven should come too soon to those who "labor and are heavy laden."

III.

It is plain that this is a narrow view of the purpose of life in the world. It is a view which destroys itself, for he who lives only to work cannot be a good worker. The best work, and the largest amount of

work, is done by those whose plan of life is larger and more generous.

In the first place God has given us a great variety of powers. Some are for work, and some are for play; some for song, and some for worship. We have our hands and our busy minds. But we have also our tastes, our sensibilities, — the imagination that

. . . “bodies forth
The forms of things unknown,
. . . and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.”¹

We have the religious nature, which connects us with the spiritual and the eternal. Each lower power is designed to minister to those that are above it. If the lower power should be developed, much more should those that are higher. Every power which God has given us is worthy of the fullest development.

In the second place, the plan of life which God has marked out in nature and in the Bible, is not merely a plan for work. It is God who causes the night to follow the day, so that our time of labor must be limited to a part of the hours. If “He giveth His beloved sleep,” their thoughts go forth in dreams, and they wander amid scenes fairer and more restful than their waking hours ever bring them. If sleep eludes them their meditation of God is sweet, and often “He giveth them songs in the night.” If the commandment is: “Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work,” it is also, “Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.” We are required to rest, because “God rested from all His work which He

¹ *A Midsummer Night's Dream. Act v. Scene 1.*

created and made." He made it plain that the object of the Sabbath is not merely that men may do more work. God connected great ideas with the Sabbath. We are not to rest as the brutes rest. God has appointed special religious services for the day, and has made it a suggestion to us of the rest of Heaven. He has made it, so to speak, a sort of Bethany day, — a day of relief and refreshment, of friendship and love, a day when we may get out from the current of toil and come into communion with spiritual beings. The highest forms of civilization, the finest development of personal character, the sweetest and most perfect home life, are found where the Lord's day is observed as a day of rest and of worship.

Observe, also, how often the working days of the people of Israel were interrupted by the great religious festivals, three in every year, two of seven days each, when all the men were required to go up to Jerusalem. These were not so frequent as to cherish an indolent habit among the people, but they were fitted to enlarge the acquaintance of the people with their own country, and to broaden and liberalize their views. It may be that the influence which the Jews have exerted is due in part to this training.

But God teaches us by His *Providence* as truly as by His Word. How often the course of active life is interrupted by sickness. How many spend months and years, when, as they say, they are quite useless. And yet to how many these lost days are the turning points in life. A large proportion of those who are now living belong to the class of disabled people. They are permanent invalids; they are unable to

walk; they are shut in from the world; they are the Lord's hidden ones. They are blind as Milton was; they are spending the quiet evening of life in rest and contemplation. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." But those who think that the chief purpose of life is activity, cannot understand why God deals in this way with so large a number.

IV.

We may learn the true plan of life by *looking again and more comprehensively at the life of Christ.*

In one of His discourses, the Saviour draws a contrast between himself and John the Baptist. John was the type of a narrow, severe man, of pure life and earnest spirit. He shunned the genial influences of social life. He dwelt in the wilderness. His raiment was of camel's hair, and his food was locusts and wild honey. He preached the law rather than the gospel. He preached, saying, "Repent," but he had no offer to make of divine help and grace. His religion was one of self-denial, and self-subjection. It was of the Old Testament, not of the New; good so far as it went, but lacking the sweet charity of the gospel, and the freeness of a true spiritual life. He had no place for Bethany. The severe, ascetic forms of Christianity are the reflection of his spirit. Hermits and monks have followed him into the deserts, and have thought to overcome sin by voluntary penances and flagellations.

Was Jesus such a man as John? Some would have us believe that He was, and that our religion

ought to be like his. But what does our Lord say? "John came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and ye say, he hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking, and ye say, Behold, a man gluttonous, and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners."¹

Jesus was not a gluttonous man, nor a wine bibber, but from this contrast, which he has taught us to draw, we can understand what manner of man he was. He lived a simple, natural, human life. He was a genial, gracious man. He did not despise the good or the beautiful things of life. He was not unwilling to be present at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, and when the wine was exhausted He provided an ample store for their innocent festivities by miraculous power. His preaching was not in the deserts, but in the cities and villages, and the homes of the people. He gladly accepted the invitations of those who desired him to come to their feasts, and He compared the Kingdom of God to a Great Supper with a free invitation. Yet He had earnest work to do. Few have toiled so severely. No one has ever tried so hard to do good, and to save the lost. No life has ever been so fully under the power of love.

Jesus began to preach when He was about thirty years old, and He died when He was thirty-three. Of what use were all the years before? Thirty wasted years, were they? Wasted years? He was growing. He was thinking. He was communing with the Father, and assuredly, there was no waste in that. But, if He had come to do the greatest pos-

¹ St. Luke vii. 33-34.

sible number of things, He might have begun earlier, and stayed away from Bethany. But if He desired to show us how large and generous the plan of life should be, — how careful the preparation, — if He would teach us that a man is more and greater than his business; that he should always master his business, and never permit it to make him its slave; then it was wise for the Son of man to wait, in His home in Nazareth, with Mary His mother, until His powers were mature, though it took thirty silent years. And then, when He did go forth, it was well to go as a gentle, sympathetic, earnest man, who loved the flowers, and the children, and the homes of the lowly, — to enter as well into the joys, as the sorrows of men. It is well that Jesus has given us an example of earnest work, — work from which no circumstance of hardship was absent, work that was never abandoned on account of difficulty, or peril; and yet, that all through this blessed life of His there were days of rest, and refreshment; that He sometimes went apart to meditate and pray; that He went, as His custom was, to the synagogue on the Sabbath day; that He went to the house of Martha and Mary, when He was on His way to Gethsemane, and to Calvary.

Again, we should bear in mind that the work of Jesus was work for the higher nature of man. He did not labor for the meat that perisheth, or to make useful inventions, or to reform society or government, or to increase the wealth of the world. He regarded man as a spiritual being, and taught that “a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things

that he possesseth." He pointed to a life of charity, and the highest goodness, as the best life. He taught us, by all His manner of life, that human beings are the really important parts of God's creation; and that every power God has given should be developed; and that whether we work or rest, whether in action or contemplation, we should seek to live as the children of the Father in Heaven, and should seek to become pure as He is pure, and holy as He is holy.

I have opened this line of thought because I think we have special need of these truths. A distinguished Englishman, who visited this country a few years ago, has published a very severe and somewhat exaggerated criticism upon the civilization which he found in the United States. He admits that our faults are due in part to the newness of our country, and the pressure of the great work of settling a new world. But he says that our view of life and its interests is too narrow, and too low; that we neglect the higher sentiments of reverence; that we lack an appreciation of pure beauty, and truth, and righteousness: and that we subordinate all things to a narrow view of practical utility; that the dollar is, with too many of us, the great object of life. Some of the things he says of us may be true. There is no human society that has yet approached the ideal which our Redeemer set before us in His life and His wonderful words. His life is broader and richer in suggestions than many suppose. If it ended at Calvary, He was preparing for Calvary at Nazareth and at Bethany.

This world is not merely a workshop. It is not the

whole purpose of life to "get on in the world." The curse of labor rests upon our race, but it is lightened by Redemption. The notion that the time is lost when we are not at work is wrong. Man is more than his work. If he permits himself to be mastered and driven by it, he is no better than a slave. Rest is a duty, not only for the sake of gaining fresh strength for labor, but for the sake of getting time to think, and pray, and commune with God. If one side of our nature requires action, another side requires contemplation. They serve the Lord "who only stand and wait." Every faculty of the soul is worth developing. The beautiful is as truly from God as the useful.

If we live as we should, life will grow richer as we grow older. The man of established principles, with the wisdom that comes from a long experience, will find that his horizon is widening with every year of advancing life. His thoughts ought to be clearer, his tastes purer, his creed more catholic, as he mounts towards the land of Beulah and the Celestial City. He should drop the prejudices, the resentments, the narrowness of earlier years, and should enter more fully into the life of charity.

Blessed is the man who has a home, and who has made it a dwelling place of pure affections. Let him make it attractive. Let it be as comfortable and as beautiful as his means will permit. Let books and pictures be among its treasures. Let some hour in the day be sacred to a real family life.

Blessed is the man who has a Sabbath in his home. It is a little of Heaven for us here. It is a day for

gentleness and love, for pure and gracious words, for high thoughts, for prayer and worship, for drawing nearer to each other and to God.

Blessed are those who know where to find their Bethany, and when to visit it. It is some place, not too far away, and not too near, where it will be possible sometimes to go: perhaps the old family home, where father and mother yet live, or where they used to live; perhaps some other home, where Lazarus who loves us dwells, or Mary and Martha. Possibly it lies beyond the sea. There will be times to go, perhaps long expected and planned for, or times coming unexpectedly, when rest is necessary, when Lazarus is sick; or times when the cross is very near and very heavy. Go to rest. Go to freshen your feelings, and deepen your experiences. Go to comfort Mary and Martha. Go to be comforted. But go, not too often, and yet sometimes.

But above all are those blessed who have learned the true philosophy of life, and who have strength and grace to follow it; who know how to do faithfully the work of life, without coming into bondage to work; who are liberal, and yet earnest and true; who are orthodox, but not narrow; temperate, but not censorious; who can use good things without abusing them; who are generous, but not prodigal; *cheerful enough to go to Bethany, and brave enough to go to Calvary.*

The things that perplex us here will be made plain in Heaven. But the joy of Heaven comes from the sorrows of earth, and its crowns from the crosses we are bearing. Heaven is not Bethany, any more than

it is Capernaum; but the cares and duties of Capernaum, and the rests of Bethany, are working to fit us for the higher service, and the everlasting rest of the kingdom of God's love.

Are they so working, friends? Are you getting from life its real discipline: living in such a way that all your experiences shall serve to build up characters that are true and strong. Childhood and youth, school life and business life, work and play, Bethany and Capernaum should do something towards it. The real issues of life will depend not so much upon what we do, or what we possess, as upon what we become; and by God's grace we can be prepared to enter into the "rest that remaineth for the people of God."



XI.

GROWTH OF THE KINGDOM BY LITTLE
AND LITTLE.



XI.

GROWTH OF THE KINGDOM BY LITTLE AND LITTLE.

By little and little I will drive them out from before thee.
EXODUS XXIII. 30.

A FEW words will explain the text. The children of Israel were encamped at Mount Sinai, on their way from Egypt to the land of promise. God had appeared upon the holy mount, and had spoken to the people out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice. A little later He had given to Moses other laws for His people. In this twenty-third chapter He is speaking of the land to which they were going, and of the way in which He was leading them. "Behold I send an angel before thee, to keep thee by the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared."¹ This beautiful figure of the angel of God leading the pilgrim host towards Canaan, often comes out in their literature. "Mine angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Canaanite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite, and I will cut them off."²

How natural it is for us to take it for granted that, if God were to cast out those wicked tribes, He would

¹ Exodus xxiii. 20.

² Exodus xxiii. 23.

do it at once. For assuredly He has power to do it. But God never does all that He has power to do. It would not be best for His people to be shielded from all temptations, and excused from the conflicts of life. "I pray not," said our Saviour, in His intercessory prayer, "that thou shouldest take them from the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one."¹ And so God said to Israel, "by little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land."

This was God's method with Israel. In the book of Joshua we read of the successful war with the nations of Canaan. They combined against the children of Israel, and gathered two great armies, which were provided with the most efficient weapons of war that were known in that age, and with horses "and chariots of iron."² The war had its culmination in two great battles, like our Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. As the result of the war the power of the Canaanites was broken, and the Israelites entered in and possessed the land, with its cities and its strongholds. But, after all, the Canaanites dwelt among them. They were subdued, but not destroyed. All through the book of Judges we read of these idolatrous people. Sometimes they gathered strength, so as to bring God's people under their power. And then, when Israel repented, and returned to the Lord, they were able to throw off the yoke. It was four hundred years before the children of Israel, in the time of David, had full possession of the land of promise. "By little and little" their enemies were cast out.

¹ St. John xvii. 15.

² Joshua xvii. 16.

I.

We have a principle of God's method of working, in this text, which I wish to illustrate. The Bible teaches that God is the First Cause of all things. "In the beginning God."¹ He created the world. He created the stars. He created man. He holds all things in being. He doeth His pleasure, and none can stay His hand. And yet this Infinite and Almighty Being limits Himself, so that He does His work "by little and little." Not in one day did God make the world, according to the Bible, but in six days, and the work of each day was very good. Our science is showing that the world was prepared for the use of men in the long geologic periods, when changes came very slowly, and each change set forward the great process but a little. A thousand years is with the Lord as one day, and one day as a thousand years. There have been, it is true, great crises in the world's history, when changes have come suddenly, as at the time of the Flood. But, for the most part, the changes have come slowly. The earth was slowly cooled. The continents were slowly elevated above the sea. The mountains are slowly wearing away, by frosts, and snows, and mountain streams. The great Ice-Age was slowly broken up. Every summer shower does something towards wearing away the hills, and filling the valleys. By little and little these changes are going forward; but how much they amount to in a thousand years.

¹ Gen. i. 1.

II.

How quiet and slow the great changes that are going forward within our own observation. Who has not admired the *changes that come at day-break*, — the early gleam in the east, the gray light in which the morning stars begin to fade, the kindling that precedes the sunrise, the shining light that gilds the mountain tops, — so silent and slow that no one can tell when the night passes into the morning, and yet, how glorious the morning that ushers in the day.

Is there anything in nature more wonderful than the *change from the depth of a winter in these northern latitudes to the golden summer*? But how slowly the seasons change. The thermometer marks zero, and there is ice and snow and desolation all about us. The mercury rises a few degrees, and the snow-drifts are settling, and the ice is softening. It rises a few degrees higher, and the drifts are gone; we see the hard and frozen ground; a few degrees more, and the streams are set free from their icy chains, the showers begin to fall, the buds to swell, the flowers to open, the first birds are here, and there is greenness and fragrance all about us. A little more, and the trees are putting on their coronal of leaves, the fruit blossoms appear; there is once more an abundance of insect life about us. The summer has come with its beauty and its power. The change has run through weeks, and even months, but every day the summer is a few miles nearer; and so it comes, surely, though with lingering steps.

We have in the world, it may be, fifteen hundred millions of human beings. I suppose there is never, at one time, food enough to supply these millions for more than a twelve-month. If the earth were to cease to provide food so long as a whole year there would be famine everywhere. How does God feed the world? Not by laying up food in His storehouses. But there is "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear."¹ In this field wheat is growing, in that, it is corn, further on it is barley,—in every field something is growing, in every land over the round world. These little grains,—so small that a little bird can pick them up,—these little grains furnish bread for a hungry world, and they have been doing it ever since God made man, and gave all these products of the fruitful earth to nourish his life. God fed His people in the wilderness with manna, a small round thing like coriander seed, just as He has been feeding the children of men for so many generations, with these little grains that grow every summer out of the ground.

III.

This is God's law in the natural world. Let us see how the same law shows itself in the spiritual world. It is not by might, nor by power, but by the still small voice of the Spirit.²

Take as a test illustration, the life of our Saviour while He dwelt among men. He was tempted by the Devil, when he was beginning His ministry, to do striking and sensational things,—to fling Himself from the

¹ St. Mark iv. 28.

² 1 Kings xix. 11-12.

pinnacle of the temple, that the splendid angels might bear Him up, to make bread from stones, to gain power in all the world by an ambitious and worldly policy such as that which Mahomet adopted, when he led the Saracen armies to the conquest of the nations.¹ Why was it that our Lord did not follow such a plan of life? He might have had more than twelve legions of angels to aid His work. They could have preached the gospel in all the world during His lifetime.²

The fact is that Jesus rejected all such suggestions as temptations of the god of this world, and he selected the quiet, unostentatious life of a teacher and preacher and helper of men. "By little and little" He did His work. At the beginning of His ministry, instead of casting Himself down from a pinnacle of the temple in a dramatic way, so as to be rescued by the angels, He commenced by talking about the Kingdom of God with Andrew, and Simon Peter, two fishermen, who had come to the baptism of John.³ The next day He talked with Philip and with Nathaniel. The next day He went with His disciples, to a marriage in Cana of Galilee, where He had been invited with His mother. There His first miracle was wrought, not for Himself, but for others.⁴ Then He seems to have gone to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and He went, as His custom had been from His childhood, to the synagogue, on the Sabbath day.⁵ Then He went to Capernaum, a city by the sea, and dwelt there. There He began to

¹ St. Matthew iv. 1-12.

³ St. John i. 38-48.

² St. Matthew xxvi. 53.

⁴ St. John ii. 1-12.

⁵ St. Luke iv. 16.

preach in a simple way, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”¹ Then He called other disciples, men of the common people, and they followed Him. After that He went from village to village, up and down in Galilee, “teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness among the people,”² sometimes raising the dead to life, sometimes commanding the winds and the sea, and they obeyed Him. But He made no display of this miraculous power. He wrought these signs and wonders when He had occasion to do so. He never wrought them to show how great things He could do. But He went about doing good, and when they brought the sick, or the lame, or the blind to Him, He healed them by a word, or by a touch, and then went on His way, to teach and to comfort and help all whom He met. It was the common people who heard Him gladly, — the fishermen of Galilee, the poor, the lepers, and the outcasts, publicans and sinners. He went, just as physicians do, to the sick, to those in the greatest need, to the lost.

I think that Jesus accomplished a great work during His public ministry, but it was a humble work, done very quietly, with great self-denial, among obscure people, a little to-day, and a little more to-morrow, and so He filled out His days and months until the work was done. I suppose the wisdom of men would have chosen a different plan of life for the divine Redeemer. We would have had the angels, who sang at the birth, become the ministers to His

¹ St. Matthew iv. 17.

² St. Matthew iv. 23.

childhood, and His youth.¹ We would have had Him transfigured upon the mount of glory so often that His divinity would have been continually flashing out, so that no one would have dared to hinder His work. But that was not His way. There was one day of transfiguration, and only one.² He was more truly divine in His estate of humiliation, eating with publicans and sinners, preaching the gospel to the poor, blessing the little children, washing the feet of His disciples, than He would have been if the glory of all the kingdoms of the world had been given to Him.

IV.

If this was the way in which our Lord did His work, it is not surprising that *the Christian Church was planted by a similar method*. There was, it is true, the great day of Pentecost, when the disciples were “endued with power from on high,” and when thousands were added to the Lord in a day.³ But that was only the beginning. Those new disciples became witnesses. Very soon persecution began, and they were all “scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles.”⁴ Those humble men and women told the story of Jesus wherever they went, and men believed. There were not many wise men among them, — not many learned or eloquent men. The most efficient of them all was Paul, the tentmaker, whose own hands ministered to his necessities.⁵ Those early Christians were gener-

¹ St. Luke ii. 9-14.

³ Acts ii. 1-4.

² St. Mark ix. 2.

⁴ Acts viii. 1.

⁵ Acts xx. 23.

ally men of one talent. It is true they had the power to work miracles, but they used this power very quietly. They never sought occasions for the display of their miraculous gifts. They used them, in connection with the preaching of the gospel, as the tokens God had given them that their commission was from Him. They used them to heal, and comfort, and help those to whom they were giving their message, but never to draw attention to themselves. They did not do great and striking things. The world despised them. "By little and little" they made their way from village to village, and from province to province, until in the course of two or three generations, the little leaven hidden in the meal¹ had diffused itself through all the provinces of the Roman Empire.

The progress of the Kingdom of Christ in the world since that day has been by a similar method. When the Anglo-Saxons invaded Britain, and swept away the Christianity that had been planted there, it took more than a century to re-establish the church in that island. It took several hundred years to bring central and northern Europe from paganism to Christianity. The progress of modern missions has been such as to encourage the church, but it has not been rapid. We are making progress every year in India, and China, and Japan, and in Africa. But it is "by little and little." The time has not yet come when "a nation shall be born at once."² The progress of *freedom* in the world is comparatively slow. The great reforms we are now pushing forward are gain-

¹ St. Matt. xiii. 33.

² Isa. lxvi. 8.

ing ground, but it will require a great deal of faith and self-sacrifice to secure the final triumph of justice, and temperance, and the law of kindness and charity in the world.

V.

Let us take as another illustration, the *unfolding of the spiritual life* in a single individual. And here I may appeal to your own experience as believers in Christ. Go back to the time when your new life began. It is possible that you fancied that the victory had been won. You had a new and living hope, with the peace of God, and the joy of His salvation. As time went on, however, you learned that you were exposed to many temptations, and that your power of resistance was very weak. So that, as the Apostle says, when you willed to do good, evil was present with you, and the good you desired to do, you failed of doing.¹ The Canaanites were yet in your land,—the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and they insisted upon dwelling there.

How, then, have you made progress in the new life? Has it not been “by little and little”? You have gained strength by private prayer; entering into your closet, and shutting out the world, and coming into direct communion with your Father, who seeth in secret.² You have found the Bible an unfailing source of strength, as you have read it from day to day. You have availed yourself of the great system of Christian nurture which the church has for all her

¹ Rom. vii. 19.

² St. Matt. vi. 6.

members, such as Christian fellowship, social and public worship, the constant and prayerful use of the ministry of the word. You have needed, day by day, to get your daily bread by the use of these means of Christian growth. If, at any time, you have neglected any of these means, such as private prayer, the reading of the Bible, or the Sabbath worship, you have found that you were losing and not gaining. Those whom you have seen falling behind in the Christian race have very often confessed that it was from the neglect of these simple duties of the closet, or the family altar, or of the sanctuary.

Each one of the Christian graces has a slow growth. Faith, for example, is weak, and unstable at first. We learn to trust God by trusting Him. We gain the assurance of faith by years of experience. Only the mature Christian can enter into the confident trust of David, or of Paul, or of that gifted New England poet who said :

“ I know not where His islands lift
Their fronded palms in air,
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care.
And so beside the silent sea
I wait the muffled oar,
No harm from Him can come to me,
On ocean or on shore.”¹

VI.

The good we have done, has been, for the most part, by the little quiet deeds of a common life. The Saviour gave his approval to such as gave cups of water in

¹ Whittier. The Eternal Goodness.

the name of a disciple, to those who visited the prisoners, and clothed the naked, and fed the hungry. He said, "he that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much."¹ "Ye are the light of the world," He said,— "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."² In saying this, He placed us in the same relation to our fellow men, with Himself, for He came as the light of the world.³ If we are indeed the light of the world, our light will go forth quietly and constantly, like the rays of the sun, which are always shining, which go without noise or stir, which would not waken an infant in its cradle, but which bring life to all the world. Great occasions come but seldom to any of us. To the largest number they never come. The great good that is done in the world is not apt to be done by those who are the most brilliant, or the richest, or the most famous. It is rather by those who are faithful from day to day, in the common duties of a common life.

VII.

Let us now apply this principle, which God seems to follow in nature, and in His providence, and in the unfolding of the spiritual life, *to the work of the church.*

I do not forget, of course, that the church has, back of it, the power of Christ. It is strong in the presence of God's Spirit. The church uses the truth which God has revealed, and the ordinances which

¹ St. Luke xvi. 10. ² St. Matt. v. 16. ³ St. John viii. 12.

He has appointed. It is also true, that every church has its own special work to do, and its success will depend upon its fidelity, and its wisdom. The work of a church is, — scattering the seeds of truth among the people, training the children for Christ, caring for the poor, and the sick, and the afflicted, and so showing forth the true spirit of religion. How simple this work is, — partly a work of education, and training, of teaching the divine word, of living good lives, by doing good to all about us as the Master did. It consists in a multitude of little things, in which the youngest and weakest may have a part, and yet the final result is such as will cause the angels to rejoice.

Here, for example, is a young Christian, with a class in the Sunday School. She studies her Bible faithfully. She visits her pupils, and wins their confidence. She seeks to get the best methods of teaching. She prays for her scholars by name, from day to day. I have in mind such teachers as that, who have been owned of God in leading their scholars into the life of faith. The influence of such teachers is very often as permanent as life itself.

Take the work of a mother, who is moulding the characters of her children by the principles of kindness, and honesty, and piety. Her own character counts for more than her words, — the tones of her voice, the whole tenor of her life. There is no other influence to be compared with hers, for she makes the earliest impressions, and the most permanent. The church which has such mothers training young souls for the life eternal, cannot fail to grow.

Or, take the work of a pastor. It is seldom that he has any great things to do. He is occupied from day to day with little things. His parochial work counts for more than his work in the pulpit. He is the minister of help and consolation to all sorts and conditions of men, to sick people, to the afflicted, and the tempted, to the poor, and the strangers, and the friendless. In his preaching the pastor needs to set forth the simple truths of the gospel, "the old, old story of Jesus and His love." He needs to keep himself clear from "philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ;"¹ and from the "enticing words of man's wisdom;" and to determine to know nothing among his people "save, Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."² The useful minister is one who gives "line upon line, precept upon precept;" who minds not high things; and who "watches for souls as one that must give account."³

The truth is, God's method of working, in the natural world, and in the spiritual world is wonderful. He loves to hide His power. He works through human instruments, so that we may be co-workers with Him. It is true, in a wonderful way, that "our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."⁴ A Christian church has within itself all the means of growth. God's spirit and His truth are sufficient to secure a steady and a constant progress. There are opportunities coming to us all the time.

¹ Col. ii. 8.

² 1 Cor. ii. 2.

³ Heb. xiii. 17.

⁴ 1 John i. 3.

The prayer of faith reaches the ear of God. All things are possible to him that believeth.

And still, our work is, and will continue to be, a work of faith. The poor we have always with us, even to this day. There are still people dwelling on the earth whose habitations are the habitations of cruelty. The kingdom of God has been extending, and it will assuredly fill the whole earth. But it is growing very slowly. By little and little, God is casting out the evil, and bringing in the good. Perhaps the final triumph of the kingdom may come in our time. But we cannot be sure. It is not for us to know the times or the seasons, which "the Father hath set within His own authority."¹

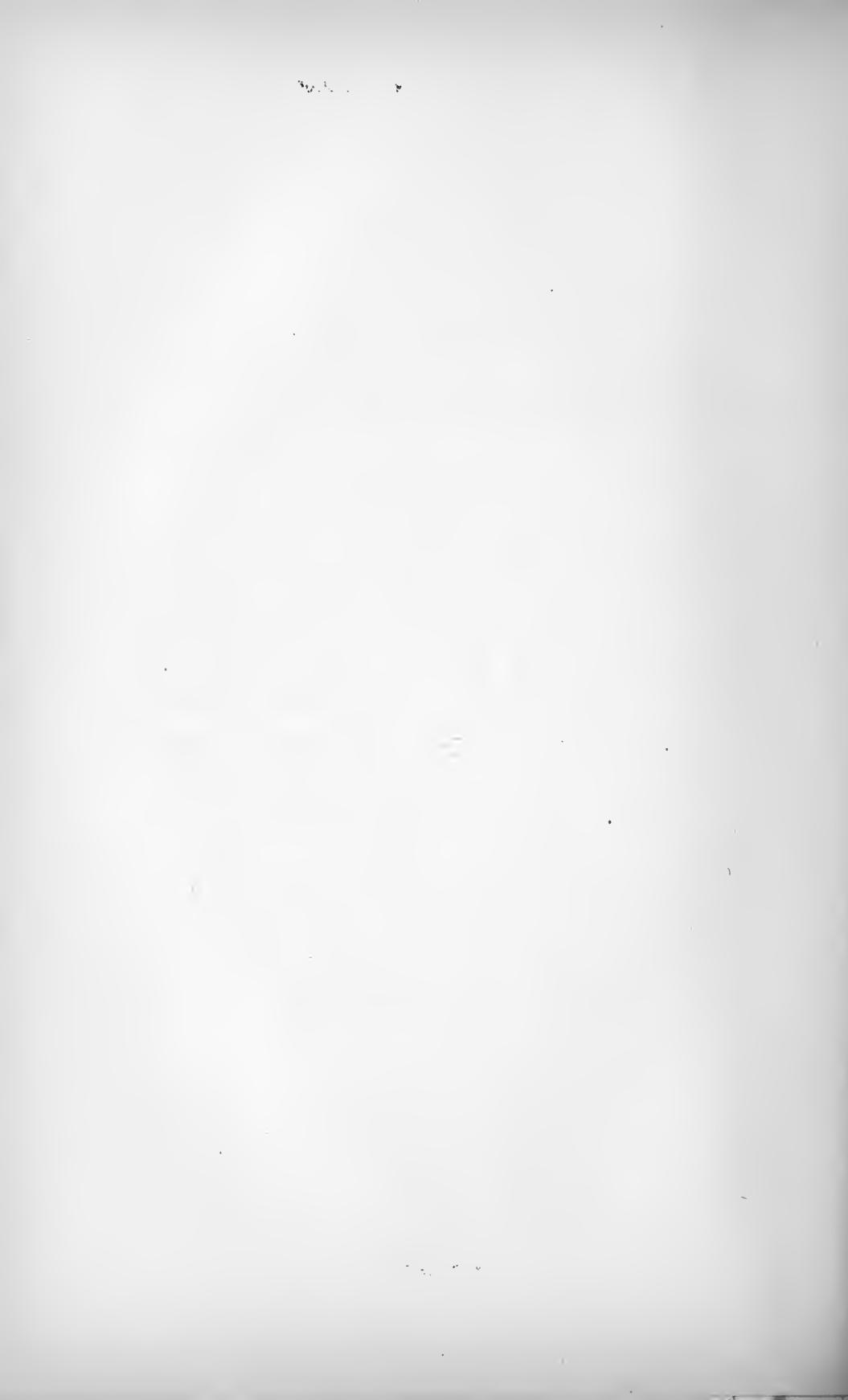
But we can build, "every man over against his own house."² We can teach our children. We can bear our testimony to the reality of a religious experience. We can speak the kind word, and do the kind act day by day. We can give the widow's mite; perhaps we can break the alabaster box of ointment. We can live, by God's help, gentle, faithful, helpful Christian lives. We can do good by little and little, day by day, and year by year. "She hath done what she could," was the highest commendation which our Lord bestowed upon any one; and if we do that, the very humblest of us will be doing something towards the complete and final triumph of the kingdom of God in the world.

¹ Acts i. 7.

² Neh. iii. 28.

XII.

THE BOUND LIFE.



XII.

THE BOUND LIFE.

And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there.

ACTS XX. 22.

IT is an interesting question why St. Paul undertook his last journey to Jerusalem. He was in the midst of the most important work of his crowded life. He had been, for some twenty years, planting churches in the most important cities of Asia Minor, and of Greece. His personal influence in those churches was very great. His apostolic authority was recognized so that he had been able to repress the disorders in the great church at Corinth, and to check the defection of the churches of Galatia. He had, as he said, "the care of all the churches," and on this account, he had written, within a short period, the most important of his epistles, and sent them to the churches. It was the period of his greatest intellectual activity, and highest usefulness. But all at once, he determined to leave all this work, and go up to Jerusalem.

Why was it?

He tells us in one place that he went up to Jerusalem to worship.¹ In another place we read that he hastened to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.² But

¹ Acts xxiv. 11.

² Acts xx. 16.

he could have worshipped God as acceptably, while at his work in Macedonia, as in Jerusalem. He had taught that the laws of Moses concerning Jewish sacrifices, and festivals were no longer binding. He states, in another place, that he went to carry the contribution, which he had been gathering from the churches, for the poor saints at Jerusalem. But assuredly, he might have sent this contribution by the hand of Timothy, or of Luke, without leaving his work.

Besides, the narrative shows that St. Paul knew that great dangers and trials awaited him at Jerusalem. He expresses the apprehension, in more than one place, that he should not be permitted to come back to the beloved churches that needed his services so much. And the question returns, why the great Apostle, who had been, for so many years, preaching the gospel all the way from Antioch to Philippi, and Corinth, should have left "his ministry, and labor of love," without any apparent necessity; why he should have unclasped the hands that hung about his neck, and left the bedside of the sick, and the dying, and gone away to Jerusalem, where he was not needed, and where he knew that bonds and afflictions awaited him, and where it was only too likely that his useful life would be sacrificed."¹

We have the answer in the text. "I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem." Some have said that by the spirit, Paul means the Holy Spirit. But the use of the word in other passages seems to show that it was his own spirit.² He was going to Jerusalem,

¹ Dr. J. O. Means, Bib. Sacra xxii. 529.

² Acts xvii. 16. Romans i. 9. Romans viii. 16.

free, as to his body, but constrained, as to his mind, bound in the spirit, by a clear conviction that God would have him go. It was not a vision such as Paul had, when, at Alexandria Troas, there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, "Come over and help us;"¹ nor such as he had when the angel of God stood by him and said, "Fear not, Paul, thou must stand before Cæsar."² This, so far as we know, was a simple conviction, impressed upon his mind, that God would have him leave his work, and go to Jerusalem. When we consider that this impression that the Lord was leading him towards Jerusalem governed his action, and led him into a new stage of his life, and that his yielding to this conviction was a turning point in his career, we have reason enough for inquiring as to *the nature of this binding of the Spirit; and its connection with our present religious life.*

I.

We have, in the first place, the plain statement that *St. Paul was bound in the spirit to go unto Jerusalem.* Turning back to the earliest reference to his plan, to go to Jerusalem, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, written a year before, we find him giving directions concerning the collection for the saints, and the messengers who should carry it to Jerusalem, and saying "If it be meet for me to go also, they shall go with me."³ So far, he was only thinking of going, but

¹ Acts xvi. 9.

² Acts xxvii. 24.

³ 1 Cor. xvi. 1-4.

had no fixed purpose to go. A little later we read, in the nineteenth chapter of Acts, that Paul "purposed in the spirit . . . to go to Jerusalem."¹ And now, after he has set out, he tells us that he was "bound in the spirit to go to Jerusalem."

St. Paul had accustomed himself to follow the leadings of the Spirit of God. He looked for the divine direction, and expected it. If he had a rising inclination to go in any direction, he sought for light as to the way of his duty, and under the guidance of God's Spirit the thought developed into a plan, and the plan into a purpose.

The Bible teaches us that "the steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord."² We are told to commit our way unto the Lord. St. James says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God."³ Our minds are open on all sides to the influence of God's Spirit. We recognize this fact when we pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." We have the gracious assurance of our Redeemer: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end."⁴ He says, that the Comforter shall come and abide with us forever.⁵ These assurances encourage the expectation that He will show us the way.

Sometimes there is simply an impression upon the mind, which is deep and permanent. Sometimes this impression is confirmed by the course of events. It is connected with prayer. In such ways God calls young men to enter the Christian ministry, or to go

¹ Acts xix. 21.

³ James i. 5.

² Psalms xxxvii. 23, a. v.

⁴ St. Matthew xxviii. 20.

⁵ St. John xiv. 16.

into the missionary work, or He calls His disciples to some special service. The Spirit seems to say to a disciple, "run speak to this young man," or go and enter upon that other service. In the old English speech it was common to term a man's business, in life, *his calling*. In this sense we all have our callings. The life of a Christian is the life of faith. He walks by faith, not by sight, and expects to be guided by the will of the Father. He hears a voice that others do not hear; he sees a light that others do not see.

II.

Following still further the teachings of the text, we should observe that *St. Paul was going to Jerusalem not knowing the things that should befall him there*. He had some general knowledge of them, for the Spirit testified unto him that in every city bonds and afflictions awaited him,¹ but as to the form of suffering that was appointed him, and as to the issue of the visit to Jerusalem, he was left in the dark. In the chapter before this we read that St. Paul said that after he had been to Jerusalem he must also see Rome.² That was his plan, and writing to the Romans, a little before, he had said: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that I may be delivered from them that are disobedient in Judea, and that my ministration that I have for Jerusalem may

¹ Acts xx. 23.

² Acts xix. 21.

be acceptable to the saints; that I may come unto you in joy through the will of God, and together with you may find rest.”¹ This request discloses the deepest thoughts of the Apostle at this time. He was on his way to Jerusalem, with a clear conviction that it was the will of God that he should go, and yet he was going as Abraham went to Canaan, “not knowing whither he went.” He had his plans for service after this journey, but he was not sure that they would be carried out. He desired to see Rome, that he might have some fruit of his ministry in that city; but he was not sure that he should see Rome. He had no idea, at that time, of the way by which God would take him to Rome,—after a long captivity, and a dangerous winter voyage, and a shipwreck:—take him there a prisoner in chains, with “a certain soldier that kept him,” to dwell two whole years in his own hired house, receiving all who came unto him, preaching in bonds, the kingdom of God, no man forbidding him.²

Nevertheless, this last journey towards Jerusalem was full of forebodings of some great change in his life. There was an unwonted tenderness and solemnity about his speech and his bearing. Thus, at Alexandria Troas, he remained a whole week with the disciples: and on the First day of the week, he preached unto them, intending to depart on the morrow; and prolonged his speech until midnight. It does not appear that Paul was ever before so long preaching. It was, as if he would make the most of a last opportunity. After He had restored to life the

¹ Romans xv. 30-32.

² Acts xxviii. 16-31.

young man who had fallen down from the third story, and was taken up dead, we read, that he came up again into the upper room, and broke the sacramental bread with the disciples, and then, "he talked with them a long while, even till the break of day." The words do not indicate that it was a formal discourse, but a familiar talk, as the people gathered about the beloved Apostle.¹

He did not go with his companions in the ship, the next day, although it would appear that they had all paid their fare for the whole voyage, for he purposed to go by land, and probably on foot, all the twenty miles to Assos, where they were next to land. The delay enabled him to spend a little more time with the disciples, for the ship must make a long course around Cape Lectum, while the Roman road which he would follow led directly across the country. St. Paul was now about sixty years old, and such a journey in the heat of that spring day would be undertaken only by a man of active habits and resolute spirit. He had been up all the night. But he desired to take a last look at the familiar places, for Troas was classic ground. He would pass by the streams of Ida, and through the celebrated oak groves, then in full foliage, which cover all that shore with greenness and shade. We can almost see the quick active man, of short stature, high and bald forehead,—as the old pictures represent him,—setting out from the city in the grey of the morning, pursuing his solitary way, taking in the beauties of the landscape, enjoying the solitude, and the hours of

¹ Acts xx. 7-12.

quiet communion with God. He entered Assos by the Sacred Way, among the famous tombs, through the ancient gateway which is still to be seen, and joined his companions, according to his plan in the morning.¹

They came, after a sail of two or three days to Miletus, and St. Paul sent for the elders of the church of Ephesus. When they were come he said: "And now, I know that ye all among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, shall see my face no more. Wherefore, I testify unto you this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I shrunk not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God." We read that when the Apostle had finished his address, "he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the word which he had spoken, that they should behold his face no more."² So he went towards Jerusalem.

Hastening his journey, the Apostle reached Tyre four or five days later. He sought out the disciples in that city also, and abode with them seven days. When he went away they followed him, with their wives and children, till they were out of the city: and then they kneeled down on the beach, and prayed, and bade each other farewell.³

Was there ever a journey fuller of pathos than this? The great soul of the Apostle was full of affection for those disciples, many of whom were his spiritual

¹ Farrar's Life of St. Paul p. 512. Conybeare and Howson, vol. I. pp. 299-305. Vol. II. pp. 209-214.

² Acts xx. 25-38.

³ Acts xxi. 1-6.

children. But he was going away from them, "bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem," bidding farewell to each familiar place as he passed it; — going in the spirit of a hero; in the spirit of a martyr; not knowing whether he was to be a martyr or not; knowing only that "bonds and afflictions awaited" him in every place. Yet none of these thing moved him, for he was ready for whatever might be appointed for him; having a desire to depart and to be with Jesus, — and yet, having a desire, if the Lord should permit, to preach the gospel in Rome; and then to push on into Spain, and plant the standard of the cross, by the pillars of Hercules.

This is the life of faith; going with simple trust, not always knowing where, not always knowing why, or how: but going forward, into the shadows; into the darkness; the unknown experiences; ready for joy, or for sorrow as God may appoint, casting all our care upon Him, and trusting His word of promise.

III.

Another part of the experiences of St. Paul on this journey related to *the persuasions of his friends, who desired to turn him back from Jerusalem.* He had to sunder very strong ties when he set out for Jerusalem. His friends had not received the same indications of God's purposes, that had been given to him. And so they held him back with all the strength of their influence. It was so at Miletus, where the disciples accompanied him to the ship, and all "wept sore and

fell on his neck and kissed him.”¹ It was still more so at Tyre, where the disciples “said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not set foot in Jerusalem.”² They said this to him through the Spirit, and what was he to do? He was bound as to his own spirit, to go, and yet these brethren, through the Holy Spirit, would hold him back. Perhaps we should say, as Dean Alford does in his commentary on this passage, that this was an instance in which the spirits of the prophets are subject unto the prophets: that is, the revelation made by the Holy Spirit was, in some sort, under the influence of that man’s will and temperament. Those Tyrian prophets knew, by the Spirit, that great trials awaited St. Paul, if he should go on, and their intense love for him led them to interpret the revelation as intended to prevent his journey. But the Apostle was under a leading of the Holy Spirit too plain to be mistaken, and so he followed the light which God was giving him, in his own soul, and gave no heed to the persuasions of his friends.

When they reached Cæsarea there came from Judea a prophet, named Agabus. This prophet, taking Paul’s girdle, bound his own feet and hands, and said: “Thus saith the Holy Spirit; So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles.” St. Paul understood this to be a message from God. Then his friends besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. But he answered, “What do ye, weeping and breaking my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only,

¹ Acts xx. 37.

² Acts xxi. 4.

but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus.”¹ It was the final victory of his faith over the persuasions of his friends, and that too in the midst of the perplexities that were raised by the conflict of revelations. It is very likely that St. Paul could not have explained it all; but he knew, in his own consciousness, that God was guiding him, and that he was bound to follow this inner light, and so he shut his ears to all other voices, and went on in the way wherein the Spirit was leading him. Let them say what they would, he was bound in the spirit to go unto Jerusalem.

IV.

In order to include all the elements in the experience of St. Paul, *we need to look forward to the issue of his journey to Jerusalem.* In a small view of things, it would be called disastrous. His ministry in Asia and in Macedonia was interrupted. So far as we know, he never went back to the scenes of his earlier labors. His life was never afterwards what it had been before. Those disciples who loved him so much never saw his face again, unless it may have been for a brief visit several years later. He did not succeed in conciliating the Jews, either by the liberal contributions he brought for the poor saints, or by the respect which he showed for the temple and its worship. He was presently seized by the Jewish mob, and beaten in the courts of the temple, and was only saved from immediate death by the interference of the chief captain. Then followed the long imprisonment at

¹ Acts xxi. 10-14.

Cæsarea, with its enforced idleness and its tedious delays. But how lofty the spirit of the Apostle during his confinement. How fine the opportunities he enjoyed of preaching the gospel, and how fearlessly he used them, so that the Roman governor trembled as his prisoner “ reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.”¹ Two years later, there were the addresses in the presence not only of the chief priests, and the principal men of the Jews, but of Festus, and king Agrippa, and Bernice, with the chief captains, and the principal men of Cæsarea, in which St. Paul repeated the story of his conversion, and of his obedience to the heavenly vision, in such a way that those who were sitting in judgment upon him were convinced of his integrity, and were profoundly impressed by his words of truth and soberness.²

After this, there was the eventful voyage towards Rome; the meeting with the brethren who came out of the city “as far as the Market of Appius, and the Three Taverns,” to welcome the Apostle in his chains, and the preaching to all who resorted to him with all confidence; the spread of the Christian Faith in Rome, until there were saints in Cæsar’s household; and then, at last, as many suppose, the release; the journey into Spain; the new churches planted in a fresh field; the hasty visits to the scenes of his earlier labors; and finally, after he had become “such an one as Paul the aged,” the second imprisonment at Rome, and the glorious martyrdom.”³

¹ Acts xxiv. 25. ² Acts xxv. and xxvi.

³ Acts xxviii. Clement, 1st Ep. to Corinthians, i. v. Eusebius, 11-22. Phil. iv. 22.

It is for a practical purpose that I have brought into one view this binding of the spirit of the great Apostle: his obedience to the divine monition, while he was ignorant of the final purpose of God in calling him to go to Jerusalem; his firmness in resisting those who would hold him back, and the results of the course upon which he entered. A grand spirit, this of St. Paul, — so simple in all the motives of action, so tender, so brave, so obedient unto the heavenly vision. His life was always a bound life. He looked for the indications of the will of God, and he was guided by them. He lived, through those years, "as seeing him who is invisible."

This is the real life of faith. It is true, we are not inspired as the apostles were. We are liable to error in our judgments of what God would have us do, as we are in our judgments of other things. There have been those who, in following the supposed leadings of the Spirit, have given themselves up to the follies and crimes of fanaticism. The man of faith is responsible for the use of his judgment and reason. We cannot guard ourselves too carefully against error and folly.

But for all that it remains true, that our whole life is to be a life of faith. The best security against the dangers of fanaticism is to be found in the simplicity of our faith, and a consistent use of our intelligence. When vanity or ambition insinuate themselves into our minds we lose the guidance of the Spirit of God. But the Christian who inquires in the honesty of his heart what the Lord would have him do, need not remain in doubt. God is so near, spiritual powers

are so real, the necessities of God's children are so great, that they will be guided in the way of their duty.

This is a truth that we should make very practical. We need the strength and confidence it gives us. We need also the peace and quietness it gives us. We need to cherish that sense of dependence on God as the only Guide in life, that comes from the habit of looking for His direction in every event of our lives. *The life of a true disciple is a "bound life,"* because it is a life of simple faith and obedience; a faith that endures through times of darkness and adversity; an obedience which no power even of human affection can hinder. God will certainly lead us, if we seek His direction; and though we do not know the things that shall befall us, or the windings of the way over which He is guiding us, yet, if we are content to give ourselves up to His direction, He will bring us safely home at last, and "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward."¹

¹ Romans viii. 18.

XIII.

THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION.

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THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION.

For ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

ROMANS viii. 15.

THERE is only one subject in this text, and that is the spirit of adoption, what it is and what it leads to. The Apostle is speaking of believers as “the sons of God,” who are guided in their lives by the Spirit of God,—that Spirit that “beareth witness with our spirit that we are children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.”¹ The very near and intimate relation of believers to the Father is that of children by adoption, so that, as true believers, we have “the spirit of adoption.”

I.

How then, first of all, shall we define the spirit of adoption?

The text teaches that it is not the spirit of bondage unto fear. It is in all respects contrary to that. The Apostle teaches that it is the duty of those who are led by the Spirit of God to live, not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Paul makes a great deal of this new spiritual life. It is not simply

¹ Romans viii. 14-17.

an improvement of the common life. It is new. Its beginning is in the work of God's Spirit, and it follows new motives and principles. Those who are Christians are to follow Christ. But why? Is it because they must, because they will lose their souls if they do not? That he calls "the spirit of bondage unto fear," and he says that belongs to those who have not become the children of God. But the Christian has the spirit of adoption, instead of the spirit of fear. He places these two, "the spirit of bondage unto fear" and "the spirit of adoption," over against each other. One is an outward motive; the other is an affection. One is from a selfish desire; the other is unselfish. One is a constraint; the other is rooted in character. The person who is not a Christian cannot have the spirit of adoption. One who is a Christian will not allow himself to follow the spirit of bondage unto fear.

It is important to emphasize this contrast because those who are not living the new life sometimes speak of Christians as under bondage, and of themselves as free from the yoke. They think of the religious life as perhaps an obligation, but as a constraint to be avoided as long as it is safe. But those who have entered upon the new life think of it as a deliverance from the bondage of sin, and the entrance into the freedom wherewith Christ maketh His children free.¹

This spirit of adoption is *positive* not *negative*. It is not after the manner of those who are always saying, "Thou shalt not." The new spirit raises us above the old desires and ways of life. It is a new

¹ Galatians v. 1.

affection. It leads, but it does not compel. It is a new enthusiasm. It is spontaneous and free. It is the natural result of the new relation to God. Our Saviour said to His disciples: "No longer do I call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I heard from my Father, I have made known unto you."¹ This was the foundation of the new society which Jesus came to establish, — this new and intimate relation between His disciples and Himself. If any one really understood the spirit of this new society, it was the apostle John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." In his first epistle he said, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God."² This is the teaching of St. Paul, in the eighth of Romans: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."³ We become the true children of God when we are led by His Spirit.

We are God's children *not by birth but by adoption*. A child who has been adopted has very much to be thankful for. If he has the true spirit of adoption, his gratitude will lead to a love equal to that of one who is born into the family. This is what St. Paul means when he says, "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again unto fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption." That is the motive for a true disciple, — the gratitude of one who has been taken from the darkness and condemnation of sin, and adopted into the family of God, and made an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ. Paul tells us what

¹ John xv. 15.

² 1 John iii. 1.

³ Rom. viii. 14.

the child by adoption is made heir to: "The glory that shall be revealed."¹ No Christian needs to be told how great this is. The humblest Christian on this earth is heir to a blessing that is infinitely greater than he would have if the riches of the world were given to him. So that this adoption is the motive for his life of devotion and of service. He has no need to go back to the spirit of bondage unto fear. His life is the expression of gratitude and love for the infinite gift of God.

The spirit of adoption, according to the text, is the spirit that leads us to cry Abba, Father. The spirit of adoption is the spirit which inclines us to apply this personal, endearing name to God: Abba, the Father, or as Luther renders it, Dear Father. Of course it does not mean, simply, that we use the name but that we have the feeling that leads us naturally, spontaneously, to think and speak of God as our Father. Do you not see how differently a man will think of God, who knows Him only as the Creator of the world, or the Power who rules the world, — the "Power that makes for righteousness," as Matthew Arnold used to say, — from one who knows Him as his dear Father, who has made him a child by adoption?

II.

We are next to inquire *how the spirit of adoption will show itself in our life in this world.*

I. First of all, one who has the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father, will certainly think and

¹ Romans viii. 18.

speak of God as a real Being, with all personal affections and attributes. His affection will make God very real to him. The God of the true disciple is much more than the God of the philosopher. The disciple will not think of his Father as a mere force or power that keeps the world in order, but he will think of Him as one who knows him, and loves him, and takes care of him as a father takes care of his child. This is the difference between one who has the spirit of adoption, and one who lives in the spirit of bondage unto fear. David said, —

“ As the hart panteth after the water brooks,
 So panteth my soul after thee, O God.
 My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God;
 When shall I come and appear before God ? ”¹

Like this are the words in the sixty-third Psalm : —

“ O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee :
 My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee,
 In a dry and weary land, where no water is.”²

In the seventeenth Psalm we read, —

“ As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness :
 I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.”³

Such addresses to God abound in the Psalms. We have nothing in the Bible that goes beyond them, unless it be the prayers of our Saviour. Not long ago, a man said : “ I worship God as the Creator; that is as far as I go.” It is plain that such a man has not entered into the spirit of adoption. His cry will be : “ Almighty and Everlasting God: O thou Creator of the world.” You perceive how far away that is. A

¹ Ps. xlii. 1-2.

² Ps. lxiii. 1.

³ Ps. xvii. 15.

child of God will call Him Father naturally, and will think of Him as near. But one who has the spirit of bondage unto fear does not want to come near to God. He would be glad if God would not come near to him. He will be quite content if God will leave him to go his own way. But, oh, how far that is from the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father.

2. In the next place, *one who has the spirit of adoption will ask God for the things that he needs.* It would be very strange if a child who loved and trusted his father did not ask him for the things he desired. If one has adopted a child and shown his love in caring for him, he will be especially pleased with whatever shows that the child has confidence in him. To ask for favors is as natural for a true child as to breathe.

So that *if God is our Father we shall pray.* If we cannot pray with the assurance that God will answer our prayers in His wisdom and love, then God is not really our Father. The two truths meet. If God is our Father, He will have a fatherly interest in us, and in our requests; and if we have the true filial spirit we shall desire to ask for such things as we need.

In the light of this intimate relation between God and His children by adoption, *the philosophical objections* to prayer disappear. Those objections rest upon certain views of the laws of nature which leave no room for God's providence. It is said that the Ruler of the world cannot consistently interfere with the laws of nature which He has established: that

rain comes from natural causes; that the issue of battles depends on the skill and courage of generals and soldiers; that the victory will be on the side of the heaviest battalions, and of the best strategy; that it is in vain to ask God to send rain in a time of drought, or to check the course of a fever, or to give the victory to a just cause in a military campaign. In a word, it is said that the Creator is an indifferent Spectator of the contests that go on between justice and injustice, between right and wrong, and that He will never interfere with the regular working of the vast mechanism of the universe.

That depends, of course, upon what sort of a Being God is, and upon what purpose the created universe is designed to serve. If God is only the God of nature, and if nature is an end in itself, then assuredly God will not interfere with the working of the great machine. But, if God is the Almighty Father, and if He has made the world for spiritual beings, and has determined that all things shall work together for their good, and if the laws of nature are only the expression of His purposes, then it is the most natural thing in the world for the Father to hasten the coming of the showers, that His children may have bread; or to guide the physician in the use of remedies that will help the sick to recover; or to send a tempest to destroy the Spanish Armada, in answer to the prayers of His people, who asked Him to protect them from their enemies. If God is a Spirit, and if He has made us in His image, and if the powers of this world are the instruments which He uses to secure the development of His

children, then He will be likely to be moved — just as a wise and kind father is always moved — by their requests.

The whole tone and spirit of religion will depend upon our idea of God. Those who think of Him as only the God of law and retribution must needs continue in the spirit of bondage unto fear; while those who think of Him as the God of love, who cares even for the sparrows, and who cares much more for us, who hath “no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live,”¹ — these will have the spirit of adoption, and will naturally say *Abba, Father*. If God were only the God of nature there would not be any place for prayer; but since God is revealed as a kind and gracious Father, we may be sure He will watch over us with a Father’s love and care, and will bend His ear to our requests. Having given His Son to redeem us, He will, with Him, give whatever things will help us towards the way of salvation.

One who has the spirit of adoption *will pray habitually*. He will desire to be in communion with God. Mere selfishness will lead one to pray when he is in danger, but the spirit of adoption will lead one to enter into his closet, and when he has shut the door, to pray unto the Father, who seeth in secret.² The pious Psalmist said, “Evening, morning, and at noon will I pray,”³ and the Apostle said, “Pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks,”⁴ and our Lord Himself taught that we “ought always to pray and

¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

² Mat. vi. 6.

³ Ps. lv. 17.

⁴ 1 Thes. v. 17.

not to faint.”¹ An earnest disciple will seek above all things to live near to God. He will not be satisfied to come now and then into the presence chamber. His love will draw him into sympathy with the Master. He will try to free himself from the things that displease Him, and to gain the things that will secure His approval. The more we have of love for God, the more earnestly we shall seek to walk worthy of our vocation.

3. In the next place, one who has the spirit of adoption will *try to do the will of God*. In his prayers he will say, “not my will but thine be done.”² His love for the Father will help him in submitting to God’s providences. If we think of sorrow as a punishment, our hearts will sink within us. But we gain peace and hope from the truth that God is dealing with us as with sons, and that all His chastisements have a merciful purpose.

So our love for God will find expression in *acts of service*. It is the love of God’s own children that inspires all true Christian benevolence. The spirit of bondage unto fear has power to secure an outward obedience. It has been sufficient to make multitudes of men very scrupulous in respect to the forms and ceremonies of religion. It has kept great multitudes of people under the power of a priesthood, and has led to the regular performance of pagan rites age after age. It is easy to drop into the bondage of fear, and to do our duty because we must. But the gratitude of one who is a child of God, gives a value to our religious acts which is far above that of the service itself.

¹ Luke xviii. 1.

² Mat. xxvi. 39.

As soon as we realize that we can do something which our Lord will accept as a token of our love we shall be swift to do it. After all needful concessions have been made in respect to the imperfections of Christians, it remains true, that through all these eighteen centuries of Christian history there has been no other power over men so efficient for good as the power of Christian love. How many thousands have delighted to spend their lives in the service of Christ. How wonderful the enterprises of Christian benevolence. How many myriads have sealed their testimony with their blood.

“The glorious company of the apostles praise Thee,
The noble army of martyrs praise Thee,
The holy Church throughout all the world doth
acknowledge Thee.”

4. The spirit of Adoption *leads to a life of faith and trust.* This faith reveals God to those who love Him. It brings spiritual things near. Knowledge cannot do that. The wisdom of this world cannot comprehend God, for “the world through its wisdom knew not God.”¹ And yet, He reveals Himself to the humble and contrite soul. These deepest things are spiritually discerned, and faith brings us into communion with the Father, and with His son Jesus Christ.

This faith which comes with the spirit of adoption, also leads us to trust the future in the hands of our Father. We cannot see our way before us. “We walk by faith not by sight.”² God gives us our bread day by day, and He gives His grace only when we need it. There are many times when we cannot

¹ 1 Cor. i. 21.

² 2 Cor. v. 7.

see our way before us, and when all we can do is to commit ourselves to the care of the All-Father, not knowing what a day may bring forth. It is the spirit of a true believer to trust when he cannot see, saying, I am in my Father's hands, and He will not do me any real harm.

5. Last of all, the spirit of adoption gives strength and confidence to the disciple. "If God be for us, who can be against us."¹ We can do all things through him who strengtheneth us.² Our faith enables us to take the measure of the unseen powers that are enlisted on the side of spiritual religion. We know that "they that be for us are more than they that be against us."³ Have we not been redeemed with the blood of Christ? All the worth of the atonement strengthens our confidence that the work of God in the world will go forward. In the very chapter which contains the text, we are led to consider some of the deep mysteries in the counsels of God. We have been "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world."⁴ "For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren: and whom he foreordained, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?"⁵

Dr. Storrs, in one of his magnificent missionary

¹ Rom. viii. 31.

³ 2 Kings vi. 16.

² Phil. iv. 13.

⁴ Eph. i. 4.

⁵ Rom. viii. 29-31.

addresses, spoke of the early Christians facing the Roman Empire, " putting Scriptures against swords ; putting narratives and letters against marshalled legions ; putting oral and sacramental teaching against the fiercest and haughtiest power the world had known. But by their work they changed the course of history, and changed the face of the earth." The foundations of the Christendom of to-day " were laid in dust and blood by the faith and fortitude, and heroic consecration of those unnamed Christian martyrs and teachers of the earliest time. Men might laugh at it then, but he who laughs at it now might as well laugh at the shining constellations in the heavens."

It sometimes seems to us too much to believe, and yet it is the most certain of facts, that the people of God, redeemed, justified, their names written in the Book of Life, going forth in faith, to do the work of God in the world, have behind them the power of God and angels. They are able to win souls. They are able to overcome scepticism. They are able to bring the world to Christ.

If these things are so, let us no longer consent to walk in bondage to fear. Let us rather live in the spirit of adoption, coming so near to our Father that we may always claim His promises, and may be strengthened by His Spirit. How great the work that lies close to us. How much greater the work in the world. But our Lord has said, " If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." ¹

¹ St. John xv. 7.

XIV.

MEN AND SPARROWS.

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MEN AND SPARROWS.

Fear not, therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.

ST. MATTHEW X. 31.

OUR Lord has many sayings in respect to value, to profit and loss, to business and trade. He teaches us to compare things as to their real worth, and shows us how God estimates them. "How much is a man better than a sheep,"¹ He says. "Behold the birds of the heaven . . . your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not of much more value than they?"² "Consider the lilies: . . . if God doth so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you?"³ "Consider the ravens . . . God feedeth them: of how much more value are ye than the birds."⁴ He teaches us that we are likely to neglect things of greater value for things of less value. "Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment?"⁵ Ye should not, therefore, make it the great question of life: "What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed."⁶ But

¹ St. Matthew xii. 12.

⁴ St. Luke xii. 24.

² St. Matthew vi. 26.

⁵ St. Matthew vi. 25.

³ St. Matthew vi. 30.

⁶ St. Matthew vi. 31-33.

rather, we should “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto” us.¹ He warns us against bad investments. “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth where moth and rust doth consume and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”²

He places the spiritual over against the material when He inquires: “What doth it profit a man, to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? For what should a man give in exchange for his life?”³

The Saviour was an admirer of nature. He spoke of the beauty of the flowers, which are arrayed as not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed. He spoke parables of fig trees, of the mustard seed, of the wheat and the tares. He knew how to discern the face of the sky, but in His view, man was more than all these, so that He went about doing good to men,— to all sorts and conditions of men, to poor men, and ignorant men, and sinful men, because they were men, and men were of more value in His sight than all other things.

But why is a man of more value than many sparrows? Why did the Divine Teacher continually place man above other beings on the earth? What are the reasons why our holy religion gives to man a place so much higher than other religions assign him? Is man of more value than the sparrows because he is larger? Take a thousand sparrows, or a million, and do they come any nearer an equality with man

¹ St. Matthew vi. 33.

² St. Matthew vi. 19-20.

³ St. Mark viii. 36.

than one sparrow? Take the largest animal that lives, and is not a man of more value than that animal? Take the most intelligent, and the most useful animals, and do they come any nearer in value to man? Compare with these a little child of a few weeks old: watch the first gleam of intelligence, the first smile, the first look of interest, and affection. Is not that little child of more value than many sparrows? Go to the last little grave that has been made in the cemetery, and see the flowers that have been left there by loving hands. Ask the mother how much that little one was worth to her. Bring her presents to make up her loss. Bring her singing birds, bring her jewels and gold, bring her what you will, and would she not give it all, would she not give all the world, if she could call back the little one which God has taken? Do not the Scriptures teach us that God cares for these little ones, cares, indeed, for all the children of men, as He does not care for any of the other creatures which He has made on this earth?

I.

I suppose men are of more value than sparrows *on account of their origin*. God made man after His own likeness, so that he is continually spoken of as a child of God, and as such, fitted to enter into some companionship with God. It is not certain that we understand fully the method by which God made man. It may be that the processes of evolution have had something to do in the formation of the physical, and even the intellectual nature of man. God accom-

plishes some of His greatest works by processes of growth and unfolding. But it is no less the work of God because it is an evolution. The beginning is certainly from God, and He directs the development of those germs of life and power which He had originated. So that it is still true that "God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them."¹ God designed man to "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."² This account of the origin of man, as a partaker of the divine nature, and the destined ruler of the world, is wrought into the very structure of the Bible. The lower animal tribes are spoken of as separate from man,—made according to a different pattern, and for a different end. The Psalms, for example, connect the human race not with animals, but with angels.

"Thou hast made him but little lower than the angels, [the Elohim]

And crownest him with glory and honor.

Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands;

Thou hast put all things under his feet:

All sheep and oxen:

Yea and the beasts of the field;

The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea,

And whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.

O Lord, our Lord,

How excellent is Thy name in all the earth."³

¹ Gen. i. 27.

² Gen. i. 26.

³ Psalm viii. 5-9.

The author of Ecclesiastes says: "Behold, this only have I found, that God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions."¹ St. Paul tells us that "Man is the image and glory of God,"² that he was made "a living soul;"³ and St. James says plainly that men "are made after the likeness of God."⁴ These statements from the Older Scriptures, and from the latest books, are entirely consistent with each other. They all teach that the Creator has placed something of His own honor upon man, and that He cares for him as He does not care for the lower creatures.

II.

In the second place, *man is of more value than the animals by reason of his capacities.* By these, he is placed over against nature, as a being not only intelligent, but also free and responsible. His rank depends not upon his lower nature, which he shares with the brutes, but upon those powers which discriminate him from them. It is idle to try to determine his rank by a study of his bodily structure alone. Comparative anatomy may teach some things concerning man's place in the world, but the science of mind will teach a great deal more.

One test of value is use. What is a thing good for? Another test is *growth.* Will the thing you have become more than it is? One tool is of more value than another because it answers a better purpose. But the most useful tool does not grow. If you find growth, there is hope of improvement. The seed

¹ Eccl. vii. 29.

² 1 Cor. xi. 7.

³ 1 Cor. xv. 45.

⁴ St. James iii. 9.

will become a tree. The little sparrow in the nest will grow to be a bird of flight and of song. Yet it can be only a sparrow. It cannot become an eagle, or an angel. Its growth is limited by the law of its nature. The little child is of more value than many sparrows because it can learn, and feel, and act in a free way. It has very little knowledge now, but it is able to gain knowledge. We do not send sparrows to school. I think it is Mr. Darwin who says that the songs of birds are taught them by older birds; but it is more likely that every bird has an aptitude for its own song. If birds can learn, it is only a few things. We admire the songs they give us, but how limited these are in comparison with a grand anthem, or an oratorio. They are builders indeed, after a very curious fashion, but who would compare the nests that sparrows build, with the palaces and cathedrals that men have built? If some one bird, out of all the birds in the world, finds out a new way of protecting its nest in a difficult place, it is a great wonder to us, because we do not expect birds to invent anything, but how many thousands of men are putting their ideas into machines every year. The Patent Office is not for sparrows, but for men. Instinct works with exceeding accuracy, but it lacks the capacity for progress. The man who can make a chair, or build a house, or invent an engine, or calculate an eclipse, or measure the distances of the stars, and trace their revolutions, — is not he of more value than many sparrows?

Still more plainly do *the sensibilities of men show how great they are.* For the powers of feeling are

the deepest and most central of all our powers. People are apt to overestimate the sensibilities of the lower creatures. Some appear to think that the attachment of an animal for its young is like that of a mother for her child; and that animals suffer as men do when they are wounded, or when they die. But there is good reason for the opinion that animals differ from men as much in the capacity for suffering, and in the strength of their attachments, as in the capacity for knowledge. It is true that certain kinds of birds are paired for life, and that they show a degree of attachment for each other. Yet Mr. Darwin, the eminent naturalist, has collected a large number of facts which prove that if one bird of a pair be shot, the survivor finds a new mate within a few hours. He tells us that a gentleman in England was at much pains to test this matter. He shot a bird belonging to a nest near his house. The surviving bird found a new mate directly. Again he shot one of the birds, and as often as the loss was made up he repeated the experiment, until he had killed thirty-five birds belonging to that nest, — sometimes the male, sometimes the female, — yet in each instance the loss was made up within a day or two, and a brood of young birds was reared from the nest. So very slight are the attachments that sparrows have; so easily are they comforted in their bereavements.¹

It takes a great nature to be capable of a great sorrow. The grief of King David for the death of his son Absalom, the profound sadness that is ex-

¹ Darwin's *Descent of Man*, vol. ii. pp. 99-102.

pressed in the portraits of the poet Dante, the terrible energy of thought and of speech in King Lear, wrenching his whole being, convulsing his soul from its depths, — this terrible energy of passion suggests to us the capacity for suffering which a human being possesses. The remorse of Lady Macbeth, as, in her sleep, she sighs and moans on account of spots of blood on her hands, — visible to no eyes but her own, — and exclaims: “Here’s the smell of blood still,”¹ reveals a power of suffering which suggests the meaning of those figurative expressions by which the Scriptures set forth the miseries of lost souls.

How significant, also, are those human sympathies that are born with us, and cherished by the whole influence of our Christian Faith, by which, notwithstanding the roughness and selfishness of the world, our joys are multiplied, and our sorrows are divided. No sorrow, or loss, or pain, comes to any of us that does not touch the hearts of those about us. We even take on our feeling the wants of those we have never seen or known. The suffering of an unknown man touches our hearts. Thus all the world is kin. Nature teaches us to “bear one another’s burdens.” A famine in India or in China stirs our sympathies. The sad state of the heathen, in their darkness and their guilt, starts a missionary movement that will not spend itself until the light of truth has been carried to all the families of the earth.

It is sometimes said that our experiences in life give more light as to our capacity for sorrow than for joy. Our literature is fuller in its delineation of

¹ Macbeth, Act v. Scene 1.

human grief than of human happiness, and in this it is true to experience. Still, our affections are the sources of true and permanent joy. Our moral nature, so far as it is uncorrupted, fits us for happiness. These Christian homes are full of experiences which make them suggestions of the heavenly home. And, beyond the circles that are illumined by the spirit of religion, there are larger circles where the influence of Christianity is felt, in which pure and deep affections, and high moral ends of life, show how much the natural man is capable of. The very fact that we are able to form conceptions of Heaven, which differ from any, even the highest of our experiences, indicates that we are made for a higher life than we are yet enjoying; for,

“ Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come,
From God who is our home.”¹

We need to connect this capacity for joy and sorrow with the future life. The earthly home is not secure. Sometimes its brightest light dies away. Yet how happy we are with our families and our friends about us. How much happier we might be if there were no pain, or sickness, or apprehension of evil, if we were never disappointed or bereaved. What a blessed thing it would be if we could call back the friends who have departed, — the loved and unforgotten, — and if they could continue with us, without fear of change, while the blessed years should come and go, especially if we could be cured of our

¹ Wordsworth's Ode, *Intimations of Immortality*.

faults, and they could be cured of theirs, so that there should never be the shadow of a spot upon any of us. Yet even this would not be Heaven. For the glory of God is the light of it. I shall "be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness."¹

On the other hand, we do not find that all are living good lives. There are too many who are giving themselves up to evil. They are becoming worse instead of better. When the end comes to them, they look back over their lives with little satisfaction. They go out of the world lamenting their failure. The consequences of sin will follow them. Remorse of conscience cannot be avoided. All these experiences go to make up the condition of a lost soul: unsatisfied, self-condemned, without the presence and favor of God, with no preparation for His Kingdom. So very great are our capacities for joy, or for sorrow.

III.

In the third place, the superior worth and dignity of man will *appear from what the Bible teaches concerning the work of Redemption.*

From the beginning God has dealt with him as a being capable of some fellowship with Himself. All the tribes and races of men have a share in His blessings. There are indications in all parts of the Old Testament that the true light was given not only to the children of Israel, but to many who did not belong to the chosen race. Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God; Job in the

¹ Psalms xvii. 16.

land of Uz; Jethro, the priest of Midian; Balaam, the son of Beor; the Ninevites who repented at once at the preaching of Jonah,— all these go to show that the knowledge of the true God was very widely diffused in the early ages, and they indicate that God had a special care for all the nations of men. In the New Testament we have the Wise Men of the East coming to Bethlehem to bring royal gifts to the infant Redeemer. Christ teaches that the love and grace of God are for all the world. He “tasted death for every man.”¹ He commanded His disciples to “go into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation.”² And years after Jesus had ascended to heaven, St. Peter taught that “God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to Him.”³ How little we realize the meaning of *the cross of Christ as a token of the value of man*. God did not redeem at so great a price, a race that was of little account. He understood what man was capable of, and He saw that it was worth while to redeem him with the blood of the only begotten Son.

The *conditions of salvation* also show the value which God places upon every individual of our race. The gospel is offered to man as man,— not to the wisest, or to the purest men, but to all men. There was a great contest in the early Church between the Jewish Christians and the Gentiles, concerning the conditions of salvation. The Jews insisted that it was necessary to keep the law of Moses; but the apos-

¹ Heb. ii. 9.

² St. Mark xvi. 15.

³ Acts x. 35.

ties taught that the gospel was free to all, whether Jews or Greeks, "barbarian, Scythian, bondman, or freeman."¹ For the least, and the weakest, has a power of endless life, and may become the companion of angels. The conditions are so simple and so easy that no one need be excluded. It is only to ask and receive; to "come and take the water of life freely." "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."²

What shall we say also of the *privilege of adoption*? The family of God is not complete, and so He bestows His love upon us, and we are called the sons of God. "It is not yet made manifest what we shall be. But we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him: for we shall see Him as He is."³ What present evidence does He give us of our title to the blessings that follow this adoption? "The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are children of God."⁴ He manifests Himself unto us as He does not unto the world. We have access to God in prayer, and we have answers to our prayers, which show that we are in communication with God. Our experiences in prayer are the fresh and constant proofs of the regard which God has for men. We may send our petitions before the highest throne, and the Son of God is our Orator there.

I know we are told, in what President Porter called "the new gospel of despair," that God cares neither for the sparrows nor for us, and that it is absurd to expect answers to our prayers. But this contradicts not

¹ Col. iii. 11.

² St. Matthew xi. 28.

³ 1 John iii. 2.

⁴ Romans viii. 16.

one statement only, but the whole tenor of the Bible, and discredits the most emphatic testimonies of the holiest men. Jesus said, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you."¹ Is there anything more sublime than prayer? A little child may make its wishes known to God, and may call down blessings upon the world. Compared with this, what are the things that are done in the cabinets of nations? What stir, think you, is made in heaven by our business affairs, by the rise and fall of stocks, by the fortunes of empires? But you and I may send our prayers for our daily bread up through the eternal solitudes, and secure the help and grace we need.

You see that humble Christian. He is not rich, or famous, or learned. But his name is written in heaven. Every day his voice is heard on high. The Spirit of God is guiding him. He may have little influence in this world, but he has power with God, and prevails. There is a mansion prepared for him in the Father's house. Every hour is bringing him nearer heaven. Soon he will tread the golden streets. You see him in prosperity, and he gives thanks to God. You see him in adversity: he is "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, yet possessing all things."² For him "to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Such is man, made in the image, and after the likeness of God. "How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties! In action, how like an angel! In apprehension,

¹ St. John xv. 7.

² 2 Corinthians vi. 10.

how like a god!"¹ Such are the grand possibilities of those whom Christ has redeemed.

1. If these things are so, *let us have no fellowship with the pagan notion of the littleness of life.* Man is not a part of nature, bound under an inexorable law. Nor is his life determined by a blind fatality. He is a free spirit, and may claim some kindred with the skies. He was made to rule the world. He may make every day great, every action important. The sparrows build their nests, and rear their young, and sing out their little life, and die, and make no sign. But has man nothing to do but to build his house, and provide for his family, and get on in the world? Is that the whole of life, — to breathe, and sing, and die? No indeed, God has put too much of His honor upon us. He has paid too great a price for our redemption. He knows us all by name. He numbers the hairs of our heads. He has graven us upon the palms of His hands. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?"²

2. Nor should we say that *any life is of necessity an ignoble life.* The things in which we differ are the small things. Those we have in common are the great things, — the image of God, the love of Christ, the offer of eternal life. God has chosen the weak things of the world, and base things, and things that are despised.³ So that we should never despise our

¹ Hamlet, Act ii. Scene 2.

² Romans viii. 32.

³ 1 Corinthians i. 27-28.

birthright because it seems to us less than others have.

3. Nor should any one shrink from the work to which he is called, however great it may be. He who has given us this spiritual being, with faculties of thought, imagination, reason, and conscience, and who has formed the plan of our life, assigning to each man his mission, may well be trusted to open the way for us. A spiritual man, thus richly endowed, is competent for all things to which God will call him. We can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us. Moses hesitated when he comprehended the greatness of his mission, but his strength was always as his day. How many others have declined the work for which God designed them because it was so great. But all things are possible to him that believeth. The world has seldom the opportunity to know how much a single consecrated life can accomplish for the honor of God, and the relief of man's estate.



XV.

THE DANGER AND THE SAFETY OF YOUNG MEN.

XV.

THE DANGER AND THE SAFETY OF YOUNG MEN.

And the King said, Is the young man Absalom safe?

2 SAMUEL xviii. 29.

THE court of King David was full of remarkable men, but no one of them had a more striking character than Absalom, his third son. In his person, he was the most beautiful young man of the nation. "From the sole of his foot, even to the crown of his head, there was no blemish in him."¹ He had also great abilities for business, for government, and for war. The influences at his father's court were fitted to develop all his powers. In that court Solomon acquired his unequalled wisdom. His father's life furnished an example, rarely excelled in history, of courage and vigor, of tender poetic grace, and of religious faith.

But Absalom threw away his great opportunities. He gave himself up to ambition, to revenge, and intrigue. He formed a conspiracy against his father, anticipating, in that far distant time, before the dawn of secular history, the arts of the modern political demagogue, and, when his plans were ripe, he raised the standard of rebellion, and usurped the throne.

¹ 2 Samuel xiv. 25.

The sacred historian has drawn a touching picture of the flight of the grand old king. "And David went up by the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up; and he had his head covered, and went barefoot; and all the people that were with him, covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up."¹ The outlines of the picture are so distinctly drawn that we can almost see the great king of Israel, weeping, and barefoot, fleeing from the city which his valor had conquered, and his munificence had adorned, followed by the small company of his faithful friends, looking back in sadness upon the homes they were leaving. It was the darkest day in David's life, for his troubles before had come from his enemies, but now his own son, in whom his soul delighted, had risen against him.

But the king had so strong a hold upon the hearts of his people, that they rallied in his defence, and tidings had just been brought, by two willing messengers, that the power of the rebellion had been completely broken. This relieved his anxieties for his kingdom, and at once the feelings of the father came out in the inquiry, "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

It was a natural question for the father to ask. He had said to the chief captains, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom,"² but he must have known how little such a charge was likely to avail at such a time. He knew that the crimes of his son had planted dangers in his path. Such a man is never safe. The rebellion against his

¹ 2 Samuel xv. 30.

² 2 Samuel xviii. 5.

father was the result of the murder of his brother years before; and that murder came from the revengeful spirit which he had cherished, and that was connected with all the bad passions of an evil heart. It was not merely because he was encompassed by enemies, but because he had been a disobedient son, a disloyal subject, an unprincipled man; a rebel against his father, and his king, and his God. He had been going on from sin to greater sin, and sin brings danger, and leads to ruin. There is no place of safety for such a man as Absalom.

This suggests the inquiry, for the sake of which I have followed the history thus far, *concerning the dangers of young men. When is a young man safe?*

I.

I begin the answer by saying, that *the dangers which threaten us from the outside are less than is commonly supposed.* It is true we are in danger even from the operation of natural laws. If you walk over the edge of a precipice, you will be dashed to pieces. If you venture incautiously under an overhanging cliff, a falling stone may crush you. These natural laws have no element of mercy, and they expose us every day to destruction. In this view, the world seems bristling with dangers.

We are exposed, also, to temptation, and the way of evil is a facile way. If you enfeeble your constitution by excess, you wake up the long train of diseases. If you commit crime, there is an officer watching for you at every corner. Yet these evils

are not necessary. They cannot harm us except by our own fault. The careful man is in no danger of stumbling over the brink of a precipice. We can walk with safety amid a thousand pitfalls. Nor has temptation any power to compel us to go wrong. The officer of justice is not a terror to an innocent man. Words of calumny cannot blast his reputation, for he is

“ armed so strong in honesty,
That they pass by him as the idle wind,
Which he respects not.”¹

The man who carefully regards the laws of nature is safe from the greatest number of physical dangers; the man of established principles can resist temptation; and he who carefully regards the laws of justice and of truth, can walk unharmed among the officers of the law. He may sleep with a conscience void of offence, even as David slept, on the night after his flight from Absalom, of which he has written in one of the most beautiful of his Psalms: —

“I laid me down and slept;
I awaked; for the Lord sustaineth me.”²

The good king, lying down in the open field, under the stars, in a country swarming with enemies, slept as peacefully as he had done in his palace of cedar.

Even the dangers which a good man cannot escape, — and there are some evils that are inevitable, — are blessings in disguise. He is safe even though he suffer. His principles are strengthened by resistance to

¹ Shakespeare Julius Cæsar, Act iv. Scene 3. ² Psalms iii. 5.

temptation. His spiritual life is refined and deepened. Even death is gain to him. So that we are not to say, "Lo here, or Lo there," as though our chief dangers were from the outside. The kingdom of evil, or the kingdom of God, is within us.¹

II.

The real dangers of young men are from themselves. We can easily see why this is so. Every appetite and desire is liable to become excessive. The most innocent of them all may become the most destructive. The appetite for food, which is designed to preserve life, may become so excessive as to destroy life. The craving for stimulant is very likely to lead to habits of intemperance, and intemperance destroys more lives than pestilence and war. These natural wants are all blind. They are continually crying give, give, yet to gratify them beyond the proper limit is to subject ourselves to a hopeless bondage. The vices which are holding the degraded in bondage have grown out of appetites and desires which, in their normal working, are innocent and useful.

The desires and tastes that belong to our intellectual nature are subject to the same liabilities. The love of enjoyment, for example, is certainly innocent. God made us, as He made the angels, for happiness and heaven. We cannot but desire that which pleases us. But what if a young man should seek pleasure as the chief object of life, and shun the duties which interfere with the present enjoyment? Will he not be

¹ St. Luke xvii. 21.

likely to develop the weakest and most worthless of characters, with no vigorous power to resist evil, and no preparation for the serious work of life?

The *love of wealth* is a higher and a more healthful desire. It leads to habits of industry and economy. It fills our homes with comforts. It is adding to the national wealth. It is the motive to commercial enterprise. It covers the land with cities, and whitens the sea with sails. It belts the continents with railways, and brings to every hamlet the productions of the most distant zones. It leads men to develop the riches hidden in the earth, and to explore the depths of the sea. Take away the love of gain, and you take from civilized man a powerful motive to exertion, and you set society back towards barbarism. There are great nations that are throwing open their ports to a Christian civilization, through the influence of commerce. And yet, the Bible tells us that "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."¹ Why? Because it is carried to excess. Men are not content to seek gain by fair means. Hence the various forms of deception and fraud. So soon as the love of gain becomes excessive it is perilous. There is danger from the ill will of those we injure, and from the laws we violate. There is still more danger of blunting our moral sensibilities, and hardening our hearts. And we are overshadowed, all of us, by the moral government of God, which threatens all injustice with a punishment reaching far beyond the present life.

Take, as another illustration, our *self-respect*. Each

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 10.

man is a separate person, with his own interests, and rights, and duties. God has crowned us with glory and honor. It is a man's duty to respect himself, to make the most of his powers, and to defend his liberty. But how easily self-respect becomes pride, and pride represses some of the finest tendencies in our nature. It becomes the great obstacle to humility, to repentance, to prayer. It holds many men back from the cross of Christ. It is the besetting sin of noble minds, and it may lead them to spiritual ruin as surely as appetite or passion.

Or take, if you please, *the love of the beautiful*. This is a natural feeling. God, who gave us taste, has made the world beautiful, and heaven more beautiful, that our whole being may be refined by the highest forms of beauty. And yet, no one of our powers is more in need of control. The love of the beautiful is not a law to itself. The cities of Italy gave themselves up to the influence of fine art during the middle ages, until they lost the more robust and manly elements of character, and sunk into effeminate luxury. The ages that have seen the finest bloom of art have been barren of great achievements. Cultivated men are going, in our time, from all lands, to study the works of art in Italy, but the people who dwell in the shadow of those palaces and cathedrals are not vigorous, or brave, or virtuous. It is notorious that some of those who have gained a very high reputation in literature have been persons of evil lives. The beautiful must be strictly subordinate to the good, and the true, or it leads to weakness and to sin.

Now the point of these illustrations is this: Our natural and innocent tendencies are liable to abuse. The appetite for food may make us gluttons. The love of stimulants may make us drunkards. The love of pleasure may debauch us. The love of gain may make us misers, or criminals. Our self-respect, our love of liberty, our love for our friends and kindred, may lead us to spurn the invitations of our Redeemer. The love of beautiful things may overshadow the higher elements of our nature, and lead us towards luxury and corruption.

Is the young man safe? Can he be, when every appetite may become a passion, every desire a lust; when every natural tendency may lead towards sin? You have stood on the shore of the sea, and watched the coming in of the waves. They seem to be moving in one direction. But if you walk out into the water, you presently feel the undertow, which is hurrying the water back towards the depths, and which is likely to sweep you from your footing, and drown you in the sea. That man must be strangely ignorant of his own nature, as well as of his fellow-men, who does not know that there is a treacherous undertow, which threatens us with ruin.

A young man grows up in a Christian home, and appears to be a truthful and honest man. But that is only the surface,—the waves coming in beautifully upon the beach. Who knows what is going on in the heart of that youth, what influences may be undermining his principles? Who can tell about the undertow? A confidential clerk at a bank maintains his integrity for years, but his social affections, his

tastes, his personal ambitions lead him into extravagances. He uses the funds of the bank for his pleasures, or his speculations, or his vices; and by and by the city is startled by the discovery of his crime, and he becomes a fugitive from justice, or is locked in a felon's cell.

Another grows up in a home of culture and refinement, encompassed by the influence of his sisters, breathing, all the years of his childhood and youth, the atmosphere of love, trained by the most upright of fathers in habits of integrity. His friends expect, with good reason, that his heart will always be the home of pure affections, that he will do honor to the family name, and will have a prosperous career. But watch the undertow. There may be the seeds of vice in his nature. There are slumbering passions. There are tendencies that lead towards ruin,—tendencies born of the very rank in life to which he belongs. Perhaps the wave will bear that young man high up on the beautiful shore. It may be the undertow will carry him out into the dark waters, and he will be lost.

We see men only on the surface. But we do not see what are their secret thoughts and motives. Aye, what passions sometimes stir our own souls. How often there is envy, revenge, and hatred within us. Our Saviour knew what was in man when He said, "Out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, railings."¹ If any man be disposed to speak without compassion of those who have fallen, let him remember what

¹ St. Mark vii. 21.

thoughts come up sometimes from the depths of his own nature, and consider what he might have done in an hour of weakness and of temptation. An hour of serious self-inspection will make us more charitable to those who have fallen.

III.

These are our perils. In view of such things as these, let us go back to the inquiry: *When is a young man safe?* And inasmuch as our chief dangers are from ourselves, it is plain that no outward protection can be of much avail. We are apt to charge our sins to circumstances: to evil companions, the wicked city, the bad world. But, if we are truly free,— and our own consciousness assures us that we are,— we cannot lay the blame upon any one but ourselves. Evil has no power over us except such as we give it. The spark will fall harmless if it does not find the tinder already prepared. That which is a strong temptation to one man does not tempt his neighbor. If we go to the root of the matter, temptation has just as much power over us as we give it, and no more. It is well to remove temptations from young men, so far as we can, but that will not make them safe. For the chief perils are such as they carry in their own hearts. If we can make the fountain pure, it will send forth pure waters even in a bad world. How, then, shall we reach the source of evil? That is the real question.

The true answer is not far to seek. We have two classes of powers: the one lower, the other higher;

the one sensuous, the other rational. The lower powers do not limit themselves. Appetite is never satisfied. So it is with passion. So with the love of pleasure, of wealth, of honor, and power. It is in these unlimited tendencies that our danger lies. The ship is out upon the deep with its rich cargo, driven by the winds, ready for a successful voyage,— but it needs a rudder, and a pilot. The steam is up, and the locomotive is moving, but who is to regulate its motion? Man with his appetites and his passions is like that ship,— like that engine. Unless he can rule his desires and passions, the ship will be wrecked, the engine will only destroy. Is the young man safe? Never, until he is able to rule his own spirit. Surround him with outward restraints, and he will complain that you have taken away his liberty. Remove evil companions, and you only put the danger a little further away.

But above these sensuous desires and passions we have, all of us, a higher nature. We have a conscience, which gives us the idea of right, and impels us to do the right. So that we are able to examine these impulses that come from our nature, and determine how far it is right to gratify them. Every man has also a free will, by which he is able to control his passions. This higher nature was given to rule the lower, under the guidance of intelligence. When the spiritual powers control those that are sensuous, man is safe; never till then. Whoever is following his impulses, his appetites, or his passions, his loves, or his hates, his hopes, or his fears simply, is in peril. For these are all blind.

A young man begins to be safe when he learns to control his impulses, and his desires, according to a law of duty. If King David had carefully cultivated the conscience of his son when he was a child, and accustomed him to do the little things which every child does, from the sense of right which every child has, — if he had accustomed him to control his passions, and to strengthen his moral nature by the habit of doing right, because it is right, he would have been preparing him for a virtuous life. The good man is the man who follows intelligently the monitions of his conscience.

The safety of young men depends upon two things.

(1) They must develop and cultivate their moral nature. They must form the habit of acting in view of moral considerations. They must make no compromise with conscience, and hold no parley with sin. They must not permit themselves to balance the right against any considerations of inclination, or of interest. They must dare to do right though the heavens fall. If a man's virtue has its price, he has no virtue.

We cannot destroy our appetites and our passions if we would. We ought not to do it if we could. These dangerous elements are the active forces in our nature. They are like the steam that drives the engine. A man's effective power depends, in great part, upon the strength of his sensuous nature. These passions will be always active, watching their opportunity, and clamoring for gratification. It is for us to rule them, in the light of duty, according to the law of God. We must eat, but not too much. We must seek knowledge, and influence, and wealth, and power,

yet we must so seek them as to use, and not abuse them. We must be temperate in eating, and in drinking; in working, and in playing; in our joys, and in the indulgence of our griefs; temperate in all things; temperate in our temperance, adding to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity.¹ Practical religion consists in following the sense of duty, doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly before God.²

But there is no permanent safety unless we follow the sense of duty honestly and fully. If a young man tries to do his duty to his fellow-men, while he neglects his duty to God, he will debauch his conscience. There are some who are living divided lives. They restrain their appetites, but they do not pray. They deal honestly with men, but not with God. They recognize their obligations to their neighbors, but they ignore their obligations to the Father in Heaven. They love their friends, but not their Saviour. They are dealing justly, perhaps, and loving mercy, but they are not walking humbly before God.

How many young men confess that they know it is their duty to lead Christian lives; and by neglecting this highest duty, they are hardening their hearts, and dulling their moral sensibilities. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word."³ We have in the Holy Scriptures the guide for our lives. They reveal

¹ 2 Peter i. 6-7.

² Micah vi. 8.

³ Psalms cxix. 9.

more fully the path of duty to which our consciences are pointing us. The more carefully we study them, the more we shall know of a true life, and the more carefully we follow their teachings, the nearer we shall come to the highest type of manhood.

(2) But this is only one part of the answer to the great question. We say, let a man follow his conscience. Let him follow the Bible. It will guide him in the way of eternal life. *But is that enough?* Alas, we are weak and sinful, and passion is always moving us, and when we would do good, evil is present with us. If we have a Father in Heaven, who cares for us, will He leave us to fight the battle alone? When we are so weak, and so sorely tempted, will He not lend us His aid? Must it not be that the Infinite Goodness and Love will seek and save the lost? The gospel of Jesus Christ is the help which God gives to man struggling to escape from the power of evil. First He sends the well-beloved Son, to remove the obstacles to our salvation. Then He sends the Holy Spirit, to renew our hearts, and to strengthen our best purposes.

Is the young man safe,—even in this world? Not until he rules himself. Not until he follows his conscience, and makes the Bible his rule of life. *Is he safe then?* By no means, for his strength is perfect weakness. He is not safe until the Almighty has put His arm about him and given him strength. With this divine help there is safety. Those whom the Lord has taken under His protection shall never perish. Our salvation, therefore, depends partly upon ourselves, and partly upon our divine Friend.

We shall be saved by *following conscience, and trusting God.*

True religion is not fanaticism. It is not something that comes to us without any agency of our own, like the dew and the rain. Religion is duty. And whoever tries to do his duty will find that he is weak and sinful, that he needs a Saviour's blood to cleanse him from guilt, and the spirit of God to form his heart anew. The invitation of the gospel is addressed to just this sense of need. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."¹

Would you, then, be safe, amid the storms of passion, and the temptations of life? There is no safety for any one of us until he has made the promises of God his own, until he has Christ for his Saviour and his never-failing Friend. Away from Christ, no man is safe for an hour. Shall we not heed His gracious invitation, for He has loved us while we were yet sinners,² and, because He loved us, has come to seek and to save that which was lost.³

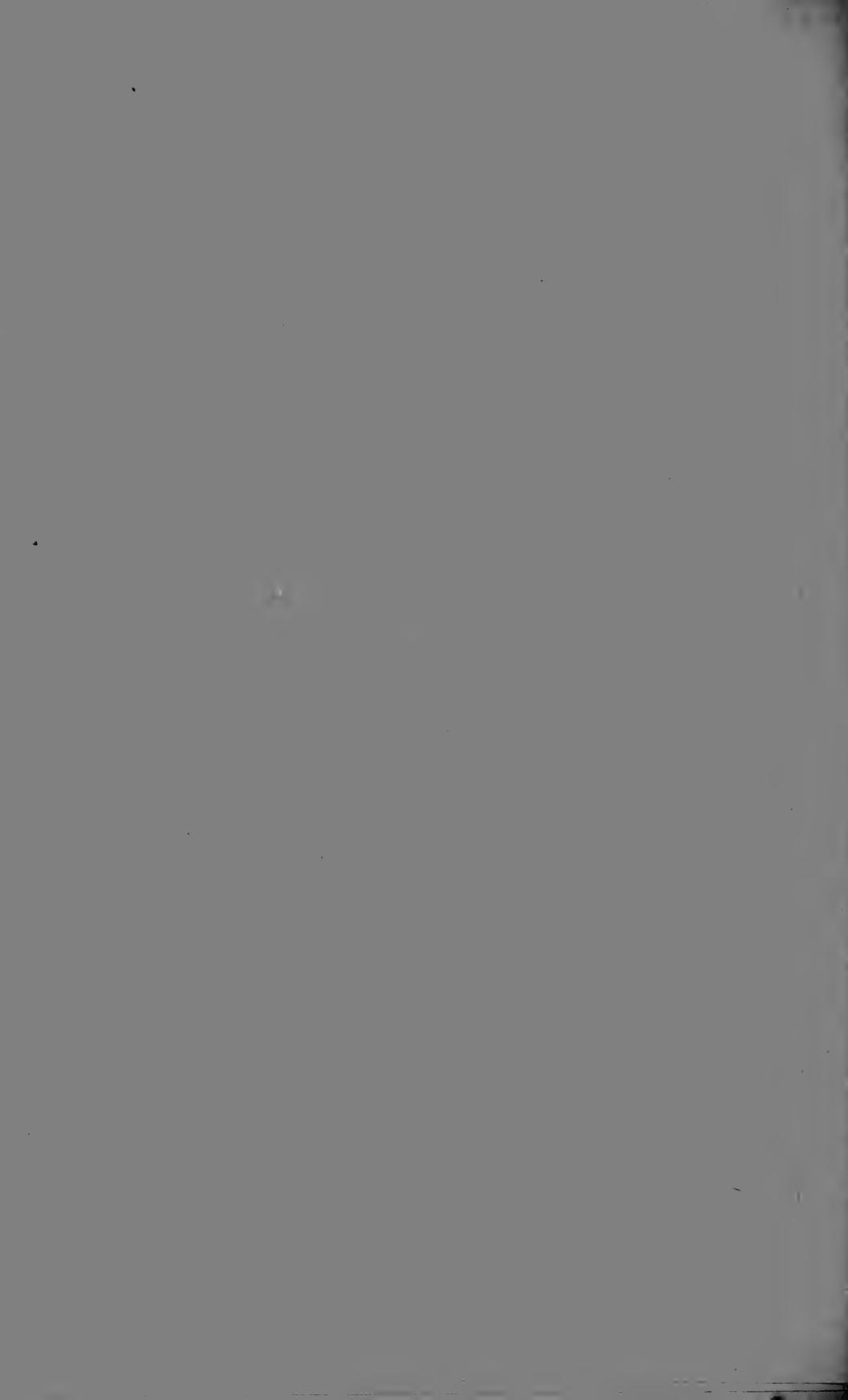
¹ St. Matthew xi. 28-30.

² Rom. v. 8.

³ St. Luke xix. 10.

XVI.

HEAVEN IN SYMPATHY WITH THE
PENITENT.



XVI.

HEAVEN IN SYMPATHY WITH THE PENITENT.

Likewise, I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

ST. LUKE xv. 10.

THIS word, "likewise," connects this saying of our Lord with what had gone before. He was reasoning, as He often did, from things that are earthly to things that are heavenly. He was trying to show what is in the heart of God, by reminding men of what is in their own hearts. He would help them understand how God feels, by appealing to their own natural feelings. If He had not taught us to do this we should not have dared to do it, but inasmuch as Christ has taught us to reason from our natural feelings and moral instincts, to the feelings and moral instincts of God, we are bound to follow His leading. Let us be sure we do not go beyond His leading, and that we follow Him reverently and closely.

The Pharisees and scribes had their own idea of God, and they complained because Jesus was receiving sinners, and was eating with them. That complaint of theirs involved an idea of God which would leave no hope for sinful men. Towards the end of His ministry Jesus spoke three parables to change

that old idea of God. These parables follow very common lines of thought, but no one can tell how much we have learned from them of the relations we sustain to God, and He to us.

Jesus says, a man who has a hundred sheep will care for all of them; but if any one of them should wander away and be lost, he would, for the time, care more for that sheep than for all the rest; and he would go after it, until he had found it; and when he had found it he would bring it back again with joy.

Or, if a person should lose a piece of money, he would seek for it very carefully, and when he had found it, he would have more joy over that coin, which he had found by searching for it, than over many other coins that had never been lost. Somehow, we value a thing in proportion to what it has cost us.

If this be the natural feeling of men, in respect to a lost sheep, or a lost piece of silver, how much more will it be so with respect to a lost son. A certain man had two sons. He loved them both. The younger son went away into a far country. He would not be controlled. He became a spendthrift and a profligate. He was a lost boy, to his father. In the strong words of the parable, he was dead to his father. But his father continued to love his younger son,—to love him, perhaps, even more because he was lost. So that when the son came back with repentance, and confession, the father received him, and welcomed him with joy. He brought forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and called on all his

friends to rejoice and be glad, because the lost was found, and the dead was alive again.

This is very simple and natural, but we should not have applied these illustrations to the method of God with men if it had not been for these teachings of Jesus. It has not been the common tendency of men to reason in this way of God's feelings towards the sinful. Partly because men have felt unworthy of God's love, and partly because they have thought more of God's power than of His fatherhood, they have taken it for granted that He would not forgive their sins unless they could make up to Him for the wrong they had done, by some gifts or sufferings of their own. Look where you will, among Jews or Gentiles, you will find it taken for granted that it is not easy for God to forgive sin. It is only in the teachings of our Saviour that we learn that He loved us while we were yet sinners; and that His love led Him to seek for the lost; and that He welcomes them when they come back to Him. All this good news rests simply upon the word of the Son of Man, who proclaimed it, not in one place only, but in all places, and at all times, making it the great idea of His ministry to men. As men rejoice when the lost is found, as a father is glad when his prodigal comes back, *likewise* (that word likewise draws after it the whole gospel), *likewise joy shall be in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance.*

We have a group of divine truths here which we shall do well to consider.

I.

The first is this: *The law of sympathy is the law of the universe.* Modern science has taught us that the worlds are bound together; that every part is related to the other parts; every star, whether near or remote, is attracted, and is attracting every other star; there is no part of the works of God that is isolated; no part left out from the sweep of the general laws; no part forgotten or alone.

So, the gospel teaches that there are bonds of sympathy which link together all the intelligent beings of the universe, so that the world of mind is one world. Man is made in the image, and after the likeness of God,—made, also, a little lower than the angels; so that God loves the world and seeks to redeem it; and the Son of God came “to seek and save the lost,” and the angels rejoice when sinners come to repentance. They are all “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto the heirs of salvation,”¹ and even the least and smallest are under the care of the angels, who always behold the face of the Father, who is in Heaven.² So that the law of sympathy makes us one family on earth and in Heaven.³ I do not see how there can be a soul in God’s universe utterly alone, any more than there can be a star outside the reach of those forces and laws that environ the universe. If the angels rejoice over one sinner that repenteth, then the angels must know about that one

¹ Hebrews i. 14.

² St. Matthew xviii. 10.

³ Ephesians iii. 15.

sinner; then there is some means of communication between earth and heaven, and that communication must be always open, for there are, every day, some sinners coming to repentance. We are not to think of the universe of God as a mere system of natural forces and laws, but as the great dwelling-place which God has provided for beings who share His image and likeness, who are the objects of His love and care, and who live in open view of angels and ministers of grace.

There is a little island in the midst of the great sea, on which a few people are dwelling. They have no knowledge of any other land, or tribe of men. Their range is limited by their own shores. If they learn to venture out a little way upon the sea, they cannot get sight of any other land. Their island home is all the world to them. But in the course of time a ship arrives from the continent, and the islanders see people of the same race, with the same powers and wants; and they learn that far over the deep there are other tribes and nations. There is a great brotherhood of mankind. The ship, which has come to them, has brought them into connection with this great brotherhood; and not only so, the ship has brought them helps and comforts, of which they had never dreamed. It has brought them the arts of life. It begins among them the process of civilization, and opens the way for an indefinite improvement.

So the people of this earth look out into space, and wonder if there are other worlds and other races of beings. They inquire whence they have come, and whither they are going; but they find no certain

answer. But to these, thus limited and darkened, there come messengers from other worlds, voices from beings not of their own race. They learn that the earth had a beginning, and that it has a purpose in the plan of its Creator; that He has made them; that He loves them; that He is their Father; and that He is causing all things to work for their good.

How this revelation will change all things to them. They are still weak, and dependent, but they can lean upon an Almighty arm. They are encircled by the evidences of infinite love. They are the objects of divine compassion, and are comforted by exceeding great and precious promises. God loves them, although they are sinful. The well-beloved Son of God has died for them. The angels of God rejoice when they repent. There is assuredly hope for them, and it will be their own fault if they do not find salvation.

The law of sympathy is the law of the universe. All men are brethren. All the worlds are connected. Heaven is in communication with earth. We belong to a numerous family. And God, the great Father, has redeemed us all.

II.

Another thought suggested by the text is this: *This sympathy is measured by our need.*

There is joy "in Heaven over one sinner that repented, more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance." Who these just

persons are, that need no repentance the Bible does not tell us. Perhaps they are the people of other worlds who have never sinned. It may be that these are so numerous as to be as ninety and nine to one of those who do need repentance. It may be that ours is the only world that sin has entered; and perhaps on that account the sympathy of Heaven is drawn out for it. Perhaps the angels concentrate their efforts upon the salvation of the human race.

Certainly the Saviour teaches in all this chapter that the sympathy of God and angels is increased by the greatness of our necessities. The shepherd cares for the lost sheep because it is lost, just as the father cares for his returning son because he has been lost. It is a principle in nature which we often observe. As soon as a plant or tree is injured, all the forces of its life set themselves to repair the injury. Or if any part of our body is wounded, the vital powers concentrate their energy to repair that part. So if one of our neighbors is sick, everybody is inquiring for him; and we are all trying to do what we can for his comfort and recovery, more than for ninety and nine well persons which need no help. You read a while ago of an unfortunate man whose boat had been drawn into the rapids above Niagara, and hundreds of people gathered on the shore, and watched with breathless interest the efforts of the man to turn his boat towards the shore; and, as he was swept nearer and nearer the brink of the cataract, men held their breath, and grew pale, and some fainted at the spectacle from which they had no power to turn their

eyes. So God and angels are drawn, by all the power of sympathy, towards those who are sinful, who are sleeping on the brink of destruction, and who are coming nearer, every day, to the limits of their probation. The Scriptures are quite explicit in teaching this truth. Christ said, "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." He came "not to call the righteous, but sinners."¹ He was the Saviour of "lost men" in such a sense that He sought the sinful, and the outcasts, and made known to these people the larger hope of the gospel. The philosophers sought the wisest, and the purest men, because they were best fitted to receive the new truths they had to give them; but Christ sought out the publicans and sinners of His time, because they were in greater need than others of His love and grace.

This point is very distinctly taught in the gospel. God is attracted towards us, not by our deserts, but by our great necessities. It is not justice, but love and sympathy which are the motives for His seeking to redeem us; for we read, "God commendeth His love unto us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."²

III.

A third principle in this group of thoughts is this: *The sympathy of God and His angels for sinful men is personal.* I think it would be a very wonderful thing if we had been told that there is joy in Heaven when

¹ St. Mark ii. 17.

² Romans v. 8.

a great multitude of men repent, because the angels are very far from us, and we should hardly expect them to take much interest in those who dwell here. But it is a great deal more when we are taught that there is joy among the angels when *one* sinner is saved. For this statement involves a more real and complete sympathy. It is like the feeling of the shepherd for the *one* sheep that had gone astray, or like the feeling of the father for the son who had become a prodigal. The text actually teaches that the feeling of God, and of His angels, for sinful men, is like that of a father for his son who is lost. Then they must know something about each one of us. They know our names and our characters, our temptations, our victories, and defeats; and they know, too, the grand possibilities for those who are saved from sin in the Kingdom of God.

It has been said with truth that the Christian religion has taught the world a new doctrine of the dignity and value of the individual. It has certainly brought a new hope to common men by teaching that God cares for man as man, without reference to his rank, or his attainments. Our Christian civilization lifts up the weak, and protects the helpless, and brings a share of the prizes of life within reach of the average man. Objection is sometimes made to this tendency. Matthew Arnold complained that the civilization of the United States is such as to favor "the average man," rather than the man of highest intelligence and culture. The civilization which Mr. Arnold unconsciously pleaded for was a civilization with an aristocratic basis. But this is in striking contrast

with the spirit of this text. The sympathy of the angels is *for man as man*, — man in danger, and in trouble; the average man, — yes; for those who are far below the average man, — for publicans and sinners; for men who were lost, and who have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ. We do not realize how much God cares for us. A man comes into the great congregation on the Lord's day. He goes to his pew. He is only one among the multitude. He is not distinguished. He is no more than an average man. But God cares for that man, because he has the powers and the destiny of a man, and because he may have an inheritance among the angels.

The division of labor in our time tends to give men a low idea of their capacities. There was more independence and more dignity in the old times when men became masters of a business, or a handicraft. But now, when each man is expected to limit himself to his specialty, to make an infinitesimal part of something, to make the spring of a penknife, for instance, or the eighteenth part of a pin, — when work is specialized in this way, *our tendency is to think of each workman as of very little importance*. A man can limit his attention to the smallest part of the work of life, and yet he knows that he has powers which fit him to do a great many things. The insect can do one thing, and only one. An animal can do a few things, but it soon reaches its limit. But a man can do so many things that the world is full of his work, and every year brings new inventions, which open the way to broader activities.

And then, man never reaches the limit of his growth. One of the commonplace sayings in regard to children is that they will take the places of their parents in a few years. But the angels look much further than that. In a few years the sinner that repented will enter into the city of God, and will become such a being as the knowledge and the purity, and the employments of Heaven will make a redeemed soul. The angels see the lost sheep wandering upon the mountains, and they know how much the Good Shepherd cares for that one sheep, and how much He can do for it, when He has it back in the fold.

IV.

The last of the thoughts that come from this text is this: *The one event in human life which causes joy in Heaven is the repentance of a sinner.* Men rejoice when a child is born, but the angels rejoice when that child is born again. Men rejoice when their children are growing up to manhood, when they are graduated from school or from college, when they enter upon business, or upon professional life. If an inheritance falls to one, all his friends rejoice. He is congratulated on his marriage, or on winning some coveted honor or position in the world. But these are only steps in the earthly life. They may not improve the character, or fit one for the kingdom of God. We are what we are at heart. Our destiny will depend on our relations with God. One who is living without God in the world,—what has he to expect in the world to come? What is there for those who are dead

in trespasses and sins,—even though they be clothed in purple, and fare sumptuously every day?

Repentance is the beginning of the new life. It is the turning away from a life of wandering, and going back towards the Father's house. It is godly sorrow for the sins that are past, and giving the heart and the life to Christ. You say it is only the beginning. But the beginning is an essential part. Every evil habit, every downward course has had a beginning. When one has begun to go wrong he will go on towards greater wrong unless he repents and begins to go back. So every part of our improvement has had its beginning. When “a sinner repenteth” he is doing his first right act. He is bringing himself within reach of the promises of God. He is securing the help and the grace of Christ. Every one who repenteth, sincerely, will be forgiven for Christ's sake. His name will be written in the Book of Life. His prayers will come up with acceptance before God; and if he goes on humbly and prayerfully, he will be kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.¹ The little leaven of grace will work until it pervades his whole soul. He will become more holy and blessed, until he is prepared to be presented before God “without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.”²

This is the gospel, as our Saviour taught it. In this way He sets forth that law of sympathy which pervades the universe: a sympathy born of solicitude; a sympathy for individuals; a sympathy for those who

¹ 1 Peter i. 5.

² Ephesians v. 27.

are exposed to the greatest perils; a solicitude for their repentance and their salvation.

1. Let no one, therefore, feel that he is alone. There is a strong bond of sympathy between each one of us, and God our Saviour, and the angels and ministers of grace.

2. Neither let any one who is unsaved suppose that his condition is a comfortable one. The angels of God are solicitous for you because they know the secrets of the other world. They know what you will lose if you lose your soul. They know what you will gain if you have a part in the great salvation.

3. If, then, God and angels are solicitous on your account, shall not you, also, be solicitous? Christ came "to seek and to save the lost."¹ "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."² "Behold now is the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation."³

¹ St. Luke xix. 10.

² 1 Timothy i. 15.

³ 2 Corinthians vi. 2.



XVII.

WHAT IS TRUE LIBERTY ?

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And he said, A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of thy substance that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

ST. LUKE xv. 11-12.

THIS most interesting parable of the prodigal son — one of the brightest gems in the whole group of parables — represents all our life as connected with God, as the life of a son with a father. God is represented by the father of the family; the Pharisees who were complaining because the Saviour received sinners are represented by the older son, and sinful men have for their type the prodigal son. The whole is under the form of a family life. There is the father, who owns all, and to whom all ought to give their love and obedience; the older son, who was obedient indeed, but narrow, uncharitable, and self-righteous; and the younger son, who thought he should have more liberty if he took his portion of goods, and went to the far country. The father's home is the centre of the picture, — the home of the family, the place of abundance, the place of return after wandering, the place of welcome for the returning prodigal.

There is nothing in any literature, or in the sacred books of any religion, better fitted to give a correct view of the relation of God to us, than this parable. Not as a judge, not as a lawgiver, not as a king, is God presented to us here, but as a father, with a father's sympathy, and dignity, and resources, so that, if the son will go away to the far country, he can provide him a portion. He will allow him to make his own choice, and yet he will follow him with a father's solicitude, and will be willing to meet him, if he comes back, with free forgiveness, and to put on him the best robe, and to give him the signet ring, and shoes for his feet, and to kill for him the fatted calf, and to rejoice because the lost is found, and the dead is alive again. Think of the old home,—the place of the sweet experiences of a bright childhood, the place of plenty, and of wise and wholesome restraint, the place of abounding love; that is the central object in the picture. There is the father, who has bound the children so closely to him that they can never forget him. If they go away into a strange land, they will be sure to think of him when trouble touches them; and if they have done him any wrong they will wish to confess it, and to ask his forgiveness, when they come to themselves. Now lift the thought from the earthly home to the heavenly home, from the best father in the home below to the Father above, and you have the point of view of this parable. The Saviour taught us to say, Our Father, because He came to reveal the Fatherhood of God, and to show us that we are all loved, and cared for, as the children of God.

I.

In the text we have a son from this family *asserting his freedom*, and going away from his father's house to a far country, with his portion of goods. The parable tells us of the going away, and what came of it. The young man said to his father: "Father, give me the portion of thy substance that falleth to me." By the "portion that falleth to me," we may understand one's time, and possessions, and opportunities, of all sorts. When we read that the son said, "Father, give me the portion that falleth to me," we have the expression of the desire of those who wish to cast aside the restraints of the Heavenly Father. Their purpose is to use their lives as they please. The younger son did not go away from his father's house because he needed to go, or because he desired to do a larger work than he could do there, but because he wanted to live more freely. He desired to do as he pleased. He was asserting his individuality, not for the sake of a noble and useful life, but for the sake of self-indulgence. So he took his portion of goods, and went into the far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. He had certain desires for a self-indulgent life, and he went into the far country that he might be free to gratify those desires.

II.

Let us observe, *the father did not prevent him from doing as he pleased*. He recognized the freedom of his son. If he would have his portion of goods, and

go and waste it, he should have it. God deals with us as moral agents. I suppose He could control us. He could prevent sin by an arbitrary use of His power. The father, in the parable, could have prevented his son from going into the far country. Certainly, he could have refused to give him the portion of goods which he asked for. But that is not the way in which a wise father deals with his sons after they have reached years of discretion. It is not the way in which God deals with us. Our characters are formed in the experiences of life, and there can be no character without freedom of action. If we are to become virtuous and holy we must choose the good, and the power to choose the good implies a power to choose the evil. If God leaves us free, then it is certainly possible for us to choose the wrong instead of the right. To be free is to be able to choose vice or virtue, sin or holiness. People sometimes inquire why God does not prevent the sin that men commit? The answer is: God does all He can properly do to prevent sin, but God leaves us free, and if He leaves us really free, then He cannot prevent us from choosing the evil instead of the good. Certainly God could prevent sin by an exertion of His almighty power. But there is no virtue in that which is done by compulsion. The same arbitrary act of God which prevented sin would make virtue impossible. If we are to be really holy we must choose holiness, and choose it freely. And if we are free to choose, then we are able to choose wrongly. So that while God leaves us free, we have the power to sin.

The prodigal was free to stay with his father, as a dutiful son, or to go to the far country to waste his substance with riotous living. In either case he would have been perfectly free. If he had stayed, it would have been because he loved his father, and desired to follow the sort of life that his father was following, and to put himself under the restraints of a life of virtue. If he went to the far country, it would be because he preferred to gratify his desires for a riotous life. These two leading motives would come up in his mind: the desire to remain with his father, and to live a good life, and the desire to be free for a life of license and of riot. He could follow either motive, as he should choose, — the lower motive, or the higher motive, the good or the evil. He could go, or he could stay.

It is precisely so in the great choices which we make in respect to a religious life. The one who refuses to come to Christ acts freely, and in so doing he uses his liberty. But the one who comes to Christ also acts freely, and so he uses his liberty. When a man says, I want more freedom than I could have in a religious life, he does as he pleases. But when another takes the yoke of Christ, and finds the yoke easy, and the burden light, he, also, does as he pleases. So far forth, the one is as free as the other.

III.

It appears, then, that there are two sorts of liberty. The prodigal son said, give me the portion that falleth to me, because he desired to gain his liberty. Just as one who refuses to come to Christ does it

because he desires to keep his liberty. One may say, I am fond of certain ways of living which I could not follow if I were a Christian, and I am going to keep my liberty. Another says, I am fond of certain vices which I could not practise if I were a Christian, and I am going to keep my liberty. Just as a third may say, I am engaged in a certain business which I could not continue if I were to become a Christian, and I will not surrender my liberty.

A group of young people are thinking about entering upon the Christian life. They agree that they ought to do this. They desire to do good to others. They think, also, that it is the highest and noblest life. They are attracted to Christ, as the Saviour of men. His love constrains them,¹ and they decide to follow Him. They begin very humbly, and with earnest prayer, and the Lord gives to each of them a new experience. They love the ways of piety. They enjoy prayer, and all religious exercises, and they love to do the things that will please Christ. They have dropped the old pleasures, because they have a richer enjoyment in the new life.

Are not both these classes acting as they please? Are they not both entirely free? Is there any difference between them in respect to freedom? And yet they are going in opposite directions. That course of life which is the greatest joy to those of the one class, would be bondage to those of the other class. The difference between them is not in respect to liberty, but it is in respect to the ruling desire and

¹ 2 Corinthians v. 14.

purpose. That which is the joy of the one is unwelcome to the other. If you ask those who are Christians whether they desire to go back to the old life, they will say, No; because we have something that is far better. They find the new life more and more attractive. So that the man who thinks he would lose his liberty by becoming a Christian is mistaken. The Christian has not lost the power to do the things that are sinful, but he does not choose them. His strongest desire is to lead a higher and a better life, and in seeking to lead such a life he is just as truly free as the other who is following the lower life.

IV.

Which of these is the higher kind of liberty? Let us seek for illustrations, first of all, in the common affairs of life. There are two boys at school. One of them is always breaking the rules, wasting his time, playing truant. You urge him to become a diligent scholar, and he replies, No; I am going to do as I please. I'll have my liberty. The other boy is regular in his attendance, obedient, and studious. The idle boys try to induce him to go with them, but he says, No; I do not like your way, and I am going to do as I please. Certainly, both of these boys have their liberty. Both are doing as they please. But which is the higher sort of liberty,—the liberty of being idle, and shiftless, or the liberty of being industrious and true? Is not that the noblest sort of liberty which opens the way to the noblest life?

Here is a group of Indians, accustomed to range at will over the prairie. They love that wild, indolent life, because it is so free. The Indian does not like to work. But is he really freer than the civilized man who enjoys his beautiful home, and his intelligent and cultured family, and who pursues his regular employment cheerfully, because it secures to him the means of living in a regular and civilized way? Is civilization a bondage? It requires regular industry, and economy, and temperance, and honesty, and truthfulness, and benevolence, in order to its highest development; but is it, therefore, a bondage? Do we not enjoy a much higher form of liberty than the wild Indians?

Here is an intemperate man. He loves his cups, and he is frequently intoxicated. You ask him to sign the temperance pledge, and he will tell you he is not going to sign away his liberty. What sort of liberty is that for a rational man, to squander his earnings, to make a beast of himself, to make his home wretched, to become a terror to his own family? But you are a temperate man. Is there any bondage in that? In living a temperate life you place yourself under that limitation, that you will not use intoxicating drinks. Does that lessen your freedom? Certainly not, because you impose the rule upon yourself. You limit yourself, for your own good, and because the example is a safe one for others. Do you lose any real liberty by doing that? Are you not gaining a higher sort of liberty?

The drunkard is free in that he gratifies his desires. But does not that sort of gratification bring him into

bondage to these desires and appetites, and does it not degrade his manhood? And yet, though he is bound, hand and foot, by low and ruinous habits, he talks about signing away his liberty. The poor, ragged, wretched man, who has lost his self-respect, and dulled all his nobler feelings, — how much true liberty has such a man? Is there any way for him to regain his liberty except by restraining his appetites, and breaking off his evil habits, and bringing that poor, broken nature of his under the control of the law of duty and right?

Liberty, then, is more than doing as one pleases. Let the irrational beasts follow their appetites and desires. But it is the glory of man, as a rational being, that he can follow the ends of life which he has chosen for himself, according to a rational and moral law. He is able to rise above his lower nature, and to rule it. In this control of that which is sensuous he enters the realm of true freedom. The freest man is the man who has brought his whole nature under the control of a moral rule. The temperate man is freer than the drunkard, because he is the master of himself, while the drunkard is the slave of his appetites. The man who is industrious and virtuous is a freer man than the one who is indolent and reckless, because the first is gaining the mastery of himself, bringing his powers of body and of mind under the rules of morality, while the other is permitting his nature to run wild, allowing evil habits to grow up, and evil principles to control his life. So, the civilized man has more true freedom than the

savage, because the first disciplines himself as to his manners and ways of living, and principles of action, while the second is the slave of his passions, and of the indolence of his dull and sluggish nature. The free man is the man who holds himself under the control of his reason and his conscience, taking upon himself the yoke of Him who was meek and gentle, and benevolent and self-sacrificing, that He might save the world. Such an one will be gaining the mastery over his evil inclinations and habits, and will be coming nearer, continually, to that standard of perfection that ever flames before us, — the inspiration and the type of a noble character.

V.

What sort of freedom was it, then, that the prodigal son gained in the far country? We find him at first in a home of abundance, of industry, and of affection; a home sanctified by parental love strong enough to last through years of ingratitude and of dishonor, and to welcome a returning son who came covered with the scars of vice and sin. The highest freedom for this younger son of such a father would have been secured by following the best examples which he found there, and bringing his unruly appetites under the law of duty, and so building up a character, — gentle, affectionate, self-centred, steady, and strong. There, in the presence of purity and love, he might have gained the mastery of his powers, and formed his habits, and developed his tastes, and cultivated his intelligence, and so won the laurels of victory.

But the weak and foolish prodigal sought to gain his freedom by breaking away from the educating and refining influences of the father's house ; taking the portion of goods that fell to him, and going into the far country, not to live a larger and more beneficent life, but to give himself up to the control of his lower appetites, — wasting his substance in riotous living, spending his estate with harlots, and reducing himself to utter penury, taking up, in the end, the poor industry of feeding swine, and eating their husks. There is the liberty of sin, in this forlorn debauchee, this miserable and hungry relic of a man, — so low, that though he was perishing with hunger, no man gave unto him.

This is the representation which the Saviour has drawn, in a few strong lines,— the masterly touches of a divine Artist,— of the result of going away from God to a life of sin, claiming the right to live as one pleases, instead of living as one ought, to follow one's own will instead of the will of God ; claiming the right to live for this world, its pleasures, its riches, and honors, instead of living for God, and Christ, and our fellow-men.

All along, in the parable, there is implied the great truth of obligation, the highest and the most sacred. The centre of the parable is the father's house, the central person the father himself. The son had no right to go to the far country to waste his substance. God is our Father, and we owe our highest duty to Him. We have no right to go away from Him, and seek our portion in this life. We ought to love God with all the heart and soul, and when we refuse to

give our hearts to Him we commit the greatest possible sin. It is this that makes us prodigals, the following our will instead of the will of God, and seeking our chief good in this life. The parable tells us where the struggle will end. The effort to gain freedom in that way brings us into bondage. We shall spend our lives in that which will fail to satisfy our spiritual wants, and when the sources of earthly pleasure begin to dry up, we shall begin "to be in want." Alas ! for the man who discovers, as the result of life, that there is no living bread in the provision he has been laying up for himself.

It is quite possible for any thoughtful man to estimate the probable results of the life he is leading. Who can be satisfied with what he has found in the far country? Does the freedom of a worldly life prove to be the true freedom? Do the pleasures of such a life really satisfy the soul? Are not those who have taken the yoke of Christ, and who are learning of Him, finding the yoke easy, and the burden light?

VI.

In the end of the parable we read that the prodigal "came to himself," and said, "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father." It was a good thought, coming to him in the "far country," and that good thought was the turning-point in his life. The higher nature, which he had suppressed, claimed his attention. It was still possible for him to go back to his

father's house. The father's love would provide some redemption for him. There was still an abundance for him there, though he had "wasted" his substance.

The good thought was not dropped. A great many obstacles would hinder his return,—shame, the fear of failure, the habits of sin, the influence of evil companions. But he held to the "good thought." "I will arise and go to my father, and I will say, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight; I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants."¹ The good thought stayed with him, like a guiding star, through the long and weary road. He would seek his father's face, and confess his sin, and give himself up again to his father's service; not seeking for the place of a son, but only of a servant.

Ah, the good thoughts that come to us in God's great mercy, to remind us of our sin and our loss, of the joy and peace we might have,—thoughts of going back to the Father's house. It may be these thoughts come less frequently than they used to come. Perhaps the conscience is becoming dull, and the sense of spiritual things dim, and the voice of God in our souls faint. These are the symptoms of advancing spiritual death. The good thought that is repressed dies away. The Spirit will not always strive with man.²

And still, all good changes in life come from following good thoughts. The road of return is open. The Father waits to receive every penitent prodigal.

¹ St. Luke xv. 18-19.

² Genesis vi. 3.

For the sake of His great love, He will blot out the sins that are past, and will bring forth the best robe, and the signet ring, and those that were lost will be found of Him, and those that were dead shall be made alive again.

XVIII.

OUR LORD'S APPRECIATION OF THE
GOOD IN EVIL MEN.



XVIII.

THE APPRECIATION OF GOOD IN EVIL MEN.

Then Jesus beholding him loved him.

ST. MARK x. 21.

THIS word, “ beholding,” is often used of Jesus, and it suggests something as to His aspect, and His habits in dealing with men. We sometimes say of a man that he has a peculiar look. We know an honest man by his look. In the same way we recognize a person of sensibility and culture. The look, like the voice, is characteristic. A painter cannot give you a good likeness unless he can catch the characteristic look of his subject.

Many things that we read of Jesus imply that when He was about to speak to a person, He raised His eyes and looked at him. In this very chapter we read, “ And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God.”¹ We read in the Gospel of Luke that when Peter had denied Him, “ the Lord turned and looked upon Peter.”² That look went to the heart of the unfaithful disciple, and “ he went out and wept bitterly.” The look of Jesus had the insight of a divine being, for “ He knew what was in man.” When this young Jewish ruler came to inquire, “ What shall I do that I may in-

¹ St. Mark x. 27.

² St. Luke xxii. 61-62.

herit eternal life ; " Jesus looked at him, and read his thoughts. " Then Jesus beholding him loved him." It was a spontaneous love, for Jesus saw at once the good there was in him, and His nature was responsive. He also saw the evil there was in him, but that did not prevent the appreciation of the good. Jesus saw that this young man, who had come to Him so eagerly, had an unusual desire for the best things. He was not indifferent to spiritual interests, like the larger number whom Jesus met. He was not content to float in the current, with little thought of duty, and less of the hereafter. He was living a clean life, for one thing, and that is a great deal. He had kept the commandments from his youth up. He desired to have eternal life. He had heard of the teaching of Jesus, and when he learned that Jesus had come to the place where he was, he came running, and kneeled before Him, and inquired eagerly what Jesus could tell him of the way to gain eternal life. The story is so graphic that we can almost see the Master, with His gracious bearing, turning to behold this earnest inquirer, who was eagerly asking how he could please God, and gain His favor.

Jesus saw the evil in this young man as plainly as He saw the good. He perceived that, with all his desire to know the truth, he was self-indulgent, avaricious, and intensely selfish. He desired to gain eternal life, but his strongest desire was to keep and enjoy his great possessions. Jesus saw, at once, that this young man loved himself, and did not love God. He wanted to gain eternal life for his own gratification.

He was not willing to deny himself, or to consecrate his wealth, or to devote himself to the service of God. He had not the first element of a true disciple. He was not willing to leave father and mother, or houses and lands, for Christ's sake. When Jesus told him that he must give up all, he did not obey. He went away,— *sorrowful*, indeed, but *he went away*. He was not willing to bear any cross. And yet, we read of this man that, “Jesus beholding him loved him.”

The lesson for us in the text is this: *Jesus appreciated the good there was in this young man, although He knew very well that he lacked the one thing needful.*

I.

This appreciation of the good in an evil man is very much like the love that God has for the world. The greatest revelation of God's love is this passage in the Epistle to the Romans: “God commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”¹ This love for a world of sinners was a real love, and it led to the work of Redemption. God's love for sinful men is the motive for all He is doing to save them, including the mission of Christ to the world, the mission of the Holy Spirit, the revelation of His will in the Holy Scriptures, and the whole system of influences by which true religion has been kept alive in the world, and its progress secured. God saw something in sinful men which He could love. We may apply the text to express

¹ Romans v. 8.

the feelings of our Heavenly Father towards the whole world, with all its selfishness, and cruelty, and idolatry, and blasphemy. As He looked down from heaven upon the children of men: the Father, beholding them, loved them. This love for those who are sinful, but who have the capacities for a better life, is always set forth in the Bible as the starting-point of God's work of Redemption. It is the love not of devils, who are utterly bad, but of men, who have something remaining of the image of God: the sense of right, of obligation to do right; a sense of guilt and condemnation when they do wrong, with some desire for a higher and better life,—a desire that leads them to form resolutions of amendment; and a desire to gain eternal life. And yet, these whom God loves are really going wrong, in spite of their convictions of duty, and their aspirations for eternal life. They are seeking the lower instead of the higher. They love the world and its pleasures. They love themselves more than they love God. But God loved evil men, because He saw in them capacities for the life of angels.

God did not love sinful men just as He loved the holy angels. Jesus, beholding the young man who inquired, "What must I do that I may inherit eternal life?" did not love him just as He loved John, the beloved disciple, nor as He loved Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who sat at His feet, and heard His word. And yet He loved him, although He knew that he was a sinful man.

God's love for evil men is very different from His

justice. If we had our deserts at the hand of God, He would not have sent the Well Beloved Son to redeem us. The justice of God would lead Him to deal with us according to our sins. It is not justice, but love, and mercy, and grace, that provide salvation. It is that sort of love which is commended to us by St. Paul under the name of charity. It is the charity that "suffereth long and is kind;" that "hopeth all things," "endureth all things;" that "rejoiceth not in iniquity," and is greater than faith and hope.¹

The best illustration of it in human life is the love of parents for their children. They love them partly because they are their own. This love gives them an insight into their best qualities. A mother will see good in her wayward boy, when no one else can see it. Her love has power to draw out the better side of his nature. It is not so easy for him to give himself up to an evil life so long as his mother continues to love him. The boy will show more tenderness to her, and more desire to do right, than he shows to any one else. If anything can reclaim him from evil, it is the fact that his mother continues to love him. There is a redeeming power in a mother's love for a wayward boy, because her love draws him towards her own goodness.

The love of God for sinful men is like this, only it is free from its weakness and its blindness. It is the love of a real Father; a love for us as those made in His image, and created by His power; a love that "suffereth long and is kind;" that sees the good,

¹ 1 Corinthians xiii. 4-13.

even when it is overborne by evil; a love that leads Him to use all the best means to reclaim us from sin, and to help us in doing good.

II.

In the second place, this love which Jesus had for the young man who came to Him, is not only the expression of the love of our Father for the sinful world, but it is also *the example and pattern for all His disciples*. For, certainly, the mind that was in Christ should be also in us.¹ The New Testament goes further, when it says, “If any man hath not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His.”² The wonderful hopefulness which Jesus manifested, that good may come even from evil men, even from publicans and sinners,—this hopefulness that good will come out of that which is now evil, should be manifested by the Christian church. As our Saviour sought out the neglected classes in His ministry,—those for whom the Pharisees had no hope,—so we should cherish an interest in the sinful men who are about us; and not only in them, but in the heathen who dwell in the ends of the earth.

Our Lord cherished these expectations of good from evil men, because He knew so well the redemptive power of the agencies which God is using, and also because He was able to read the thoughts and motives of men. We can judge of our fellow-men by what we know of ourselves. We never do wrong without some sort of excuse to our consciences,

¹ Philippians ii. 5.

² Romans viii. 9.

which are always making their silent protest against the wrong. Those whom we condemn for the evil they are doing are very much like us. They are living mixed lives. Sometimes the evil they do they allow not. They have many thoughts of doing good, but the influences about them choke the good thoughts. If we were as charitable in our judgments of others as we are in judging ourselves, we should not cast them off. The fact is that in our neighbors, as in us, evil exists with the good. It is possible that we are not making a better use of our opportunities than our fellow-men are making of theirs. There are very often tender sympathies, and kind thoughts, and resolutions to lead better lives, — recollections of the teachings they received years ago, — in those who seem to be given up to vice and crime. The Saviour, beholding these survivals of the image of God, loves evil men; and if we enter into His spirit, we shall share His love.

Our Lord came to the world not to judge men, but to save men. There is no salvation for the guilty in strict justice. And so He says to us, "Judge not, that ye be not judged."¹ Whenever the spirit of this world, with its selfish, hardening quality, takes possession of us, we cease to live as the helpers and saviours of our fellow-men, and we estimate the possibilities of repentance for the sinful according to the maxims of this world. We are tempted to live for ourselves alone, seeking to build up the divine life within us, when we ought to be sharing what we have of God's grace and truth with our fellow-men. The

¹ St. Matthew vii. 1.

nearer we come to the mind that was in Christ, the more we shall have of His grace. The joy which this world cannot give comes to those who enter into the love which led the Redeemer to bear the sins of the world that the world might be saved.

III.

One reason why we should cherish these expectations of good concerning those who are now evil is that *this will prepare us to do them good*. This was the secret of the power that Jesus had over the sinful. He came on the mission of Redemption, because He knew so well the possibilities of improvement for men. His hopeful love led Him to seek and to save the lost. He ate with publicans and sinners, as one means of showing His sympathy, and of awakening their hopes. He did not repel the woman who washed His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, though He knew that she was a sinner of such a sort as makes a woman an outcast. There was no pollution for Him in her touch, because He saw, in her stained and polluted soul, the possibility of a great repentance and a great salvation. He was able to discern the image of God in her. As the diamond is rough and unpromising when it is taken from the mine, and needs to be skilfully worked that its brilliancy may appear, so the souls that have been debased and dimmed by the defilements of sin need to be cleansed and brightened by the spirit of God, that the image of God may shine out.

We are to bear in mind that in all souls not utterly

dead, there is some desire for a better life. There is something to which the gospel appeals. It meets the deepest wants. This is the ground of hope in preaching. The truth always secures some conversions in any congregation where it is preached in the spirit of sympathy and hope, in any part of the world. For there is a witness for God in every man, which holds him responsible for his actions, and urges him to follow the better way. If the secret thoughts of people who are outside the churches could be known, they would give great encouragement to those who are trying to do them good. Many men who have given themselves up to intemperance and vice, feel their bondage, and cherish the hope that at some time they may escape from it. But long experience in sin has confirmed their evil habits; their companions are as wicked as themselves, and the failure of their efforts to reform has disheartened them. Some such men are looking to the churches with the hope that some help will come from them. We have the testimony of some such men, that, at the time when they were very far from a good life, they clung to the expectation that some influences from Christians would reach them. There have been instances of such people hovering about the churches, looking in, perhaps, at the evening service, with a desire to gain that spiritual experience which they were sure that true Christians had. And this has been the means of their salvation.

The success of the preaching of Christ and of His Apostles to the publicans and sinners of their time, confirms this view. The history of missions to the

lower races confirms it. The success of the Wesleyan preachers in England a century ago confirms it. The work which the Salvation Army is doing among people who had seemed to be given up to unbelief and sin, shows how much can be accomplished by those who will go to evil men with sympathy, and confidence in the regenerating power of the truth and of the Spirit. More recently, the Volunteers, in this country, have been testing the power of the simple gospel to rescue the criminals in our prisons. Those who are content to find their field of labor among publicans and sinners have very often found a richer field than those who have preached to the Scribes and Pharisees of their time.

IV.

The church certainly has a mission to those who are not far from the Kingdom. It has a mission to its own children, and to those who come from week to week to attend religious services. It has always been the method of God's economy to gather His people into the religious community, with its vast resources of Christian knowledge and consecrated wealth, and to continue this community through the generations as the source and reservoir of spiritual power. The light is to go out from this source to those who are outside,—to the great masses of the unsaved. The highest work of the church is, like that of the Master, "to seek and save the lost." But there are times when the churches seem, to those who are outside, to be selfish and exclusive, their

members more anxious to save their own souls than to save their fellow-men; rejoicing to read their

“ title clear
To mansions in the skies,”

but unmindful of the condition of the unsaved about them.

That impression is in many instances unjust, but it is a real obstacle to the best work of the churches. That impression is one cause of the increasing neglect of public worship. People say: If they were in earnest they would talk with us about a religious experience, and invite us to go with them to the church. The same feeling is shown by the gratitude which they express to those who talk with them earnestly about their salvation.

The community is always interested in the religious tone and spirit of the church. Whenever there is an increase of earnestness among Christians the congregation begins to fill up. Let it be understood that there is an awakening among believers, greater fervency in prayer, with an evident desire for the conversion of men, and those who are outside will come in. People will go away from the places that only gratify their taste, but they will crowd the churches where Christians meet them with the sympathy that springs from a genuine desire for their salvation. For the men of the world are not all unbelievers. They remember the truths they learned in earlier years. These have followed them through the changes of their lives. Unconsciously to themselves, many of them are hoping that at some time they shall be

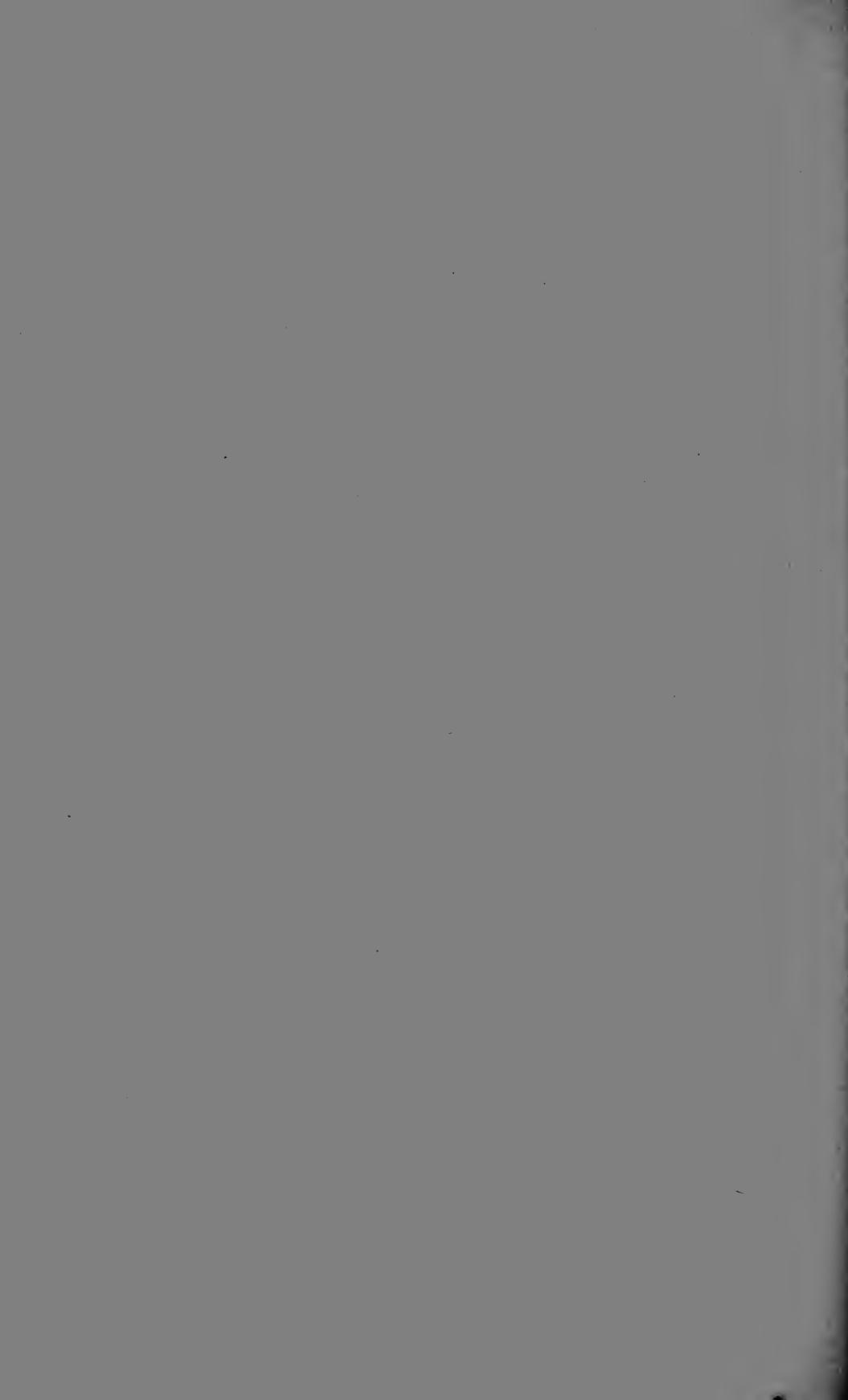
better than they now are. When they see that we really care for their souls, they are likely to respond to our invitations, and to come with us to the Saviour of lost men.

It is true, however, that *we have no assurance that all will accept the free offers of the gospel.* The young man who came to Jesus went away to his great possessions. Even the love of Christ did not always induce those whom He met to follow Him. The obstacle is not that God's interest in man is limited,¹ but that God leaves man *free to accept or to reject the offers of His grace.* If a man is able to reject those offers for one day, it is possible that he may reject them for all days. The experience of our Saviour and of all His followers shows that when the best possible means are used with evil men, they may be in vain. All the more important, is it, therefore, to use the best means in the best possible way. The work of Redemption has always been limited by the unbelief of those to whom the great salvation has been offered. But as the love of Christ constrained the earliest disciples to follow Him, so, in these latest times, the power of our religion has been the power of love. It is the love of God that is drawing the world unto Him. We must manifest a love like His, if we would have a part in His work.

¹ Immortality and the New Theodicy, Rev. George A. Gordon, D.D.

XIX.

THE LIFE BEYOND THE CLOUD.



XIX.

THE LIFE BEYOND THE CLOUD.

And when he had said these things, as they were looking, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

ACTS i. 9.

THIS is Easter Sunday,—the Sunday of the resurrection of our Lord. It was fitting that the spring, which comes so much earlier in Judæa than in our colder latitude, should have been the season of His resurrection. When nature begins to renew its life, with the returning sun, at the time of the vernal equinox, it has been thought to be a type of the renewal of life after death. That was the season, beyond all doubt, when the Son of man arose from the dead, and became the first fruits of them that slept. By His resurrection He gave us the assurance of our resurrection, and taught us something of its nature, for the Apostle tells us that our “bodies shall be fashioned like unto His glorious body.”¹

I.

We can think of some things without the Bible, which make it probable that there is another life. The present life is so incomplete, and so unsatisfac-

¹ Philippians iii. 21.

tory, that we are inclined to believe that there is some higher sphere for us, in which our powers will develop more freely, and in which we can come nearer the fruition of our hopes than we can come here. The state of the world, and the hard conditions under which life goes on, suggest the hope that the Creator will provide for us a better life than this. Besides, there seems to be in our nature an instinctive desire for continued existence, and an expectation of it. This tendency is so decided, and so permanent, that, speaking broadly, one may say that all men, in all stages of social life, and in all ages of the world, have believed in a life beyond the present. Some of the earliest philosophers have set forth the reasons for this belief with great clearness and force. The *Phædo* of Plato, written three centuries and a half before the coming of Christ, contains a wonderful argument for immortality, drawn from the nature of the soul. Plato attempts to bring the doctrine of a future life into connection with his theory of knowledge.¹ The belief in immortality has shown its power not only in the best literature of the world, but especially in the religious rites of all nations. The motives connected with this belief have always had a large place in the life of man. The belief in another life, which has appeared so generally among the beliefs of men, seems to have come from an original tendency in the soul, or from some knowledge which God gave to man in His earliest revelation.

¹ The *Phædo*, in Jowett's *Plato*, vol i. 429-499. See a full statement in *The Witness to Immortality*, by Dr. George A. Gordon, pp. 135-179.

II.

But the most of us *need to have something added to these natural beliefs.* We cannot help the wish that those who have gone from this life could come back and tell us what they have experienced. Death is a mystery. It comes on gradually, or suddenly. The processes of physical life cease. The mind loses the power to communicate with us. The friend who is dying speaks to us up to a certain moment, and then he speaks no more. He hears no more, so far as we know. We say, the life and the spirit are gone. We hope this is not the end. We think that if a man die he will live again. Men have been so confident of it that they have said that they knew it. But it is a great help to this hope, that Christ came to bring life and incorruption to light through the gospel.¹

The life of Christ in this world is itself a proof of the reality of a spiritual world, for He came out of that world into this. Our existence begins here, so far as we know. We can tell how many years we have had a being. But Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am."² He spoke naturally and familiarly of His pre-existence. If we are to believe His most explicit statements, we must believe that He came forth from the Father to save lost men. Back of His earthly life was His life in Heaven. He discoursed as one who had grown familiar with the eternal world, and was able to reveal its mysteries. He speaks again and again to His Father, who dwelleth in the

¹ 2 Timothy i. 10.

² St. John viii. 58.

unseen world, and receives answers in articulate words. "Father, glorify Thy name," He said; and "there came a voice out of Heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again."¹ There appeared unto Him, on the mount, Moses and Elijah, coming directly out of the spiritual world, and they talked with Him of His death at Jerusalem. "I have accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do," he said, "but now I come to thee."² When Jesus told His disciples that He was going away, Peter said, "Lord, whither goest thou?" Jesus answered, "Whither I go thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow afterwards."³ It is often a comfort and help to one who is troubled to realize the existence of the spiritual world, that, although departed spirits cannot come back to us, we have had in this world this wonderful Being, who has told us, with all the impressiveness that His character gives to His words, that He had Himself existed in that world, and that He was going back into it, and that He would draw after Him all His disciples, that they might be with Him in the Father's house.

III.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the crowning proof to us that there is another life. He had told His disciples so often that He should be raised the third day that the prediction was known even to His enemies, and they devised a plan to pre-

¹ St. John xii. 28.

² St. John xvii. 4 and 13.

³ St. John xiii. 36.

vent His disciples from coming by night and stealing His body. The evidence for His resurrection is as decisive as the evidence for any other fact in history. If there be anything certain in the teachings of the New Testament concerning the wonderful Being who lived in Judæa eighteen hundred years ago, and who was crucified by Pontius Pilate, this is certain: that He rose from the grave to a conscious and personal life, and that, in due time, He went back into that spiritual world from which He had come. In thus rising from the dead, and ascending to Heaven, He has taught us that there is for us a conscious life after death.

The ascension of our Lord to Heaven has always been regarded as the culminating point in His resurrection from the dead. He showed Himself alive unto His disciples, being seen of them for six weeks, in various places, and under a variety of circumstances, in order to furnish to them decisive proofs that He had come back from the grave to a real and conscious life among men, but these manifestations would have defeated their purpose if they had continued too long. He designed to furnish in His own person, a proof of the resurrection from the dead, so that we should have the assurance of a life to come; but having furnished that proof, it was also necessary for Him to pass from the sight of men into the spiritual world. Two of the Gospels tell us that He did so. St. Mark says that "He was received up into Heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God."¹ St. Luke

¹ St. Mark xvi. 19.

says, in his Gospel, "It came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and was carried up into Heaven."¹ In the Acts, he tells us more particularly, that it was forty days after His resurrection, and that the ascension was witnessed by His apostles whom He had chosen, — that as "they were looking He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they were looking steadfastly into Heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel: which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into Heaven? This Jesus, which was received up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld Him going into Heaven."² The ascension is also referred to in several passages in the Gospel of St. John. At one time Jesus said to His disciples, "Doth this cause you to stumble? What, then, if ye should behold the Son of man ascending where He was before?"³ He said to Mary Magdalene, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended unto the Father."⁴ And St. Paul also tells us, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, that Christ ascended up "far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things."⁵ In the Epistle to Timothy, he says that "He who was manifested in the flesh," was "received up into glory."⁶ So that the evidence for the ascension of our Lord to Heaven is contained in every part of the New Testament. He spoke of it to His disciples before it took place; they testify to the ascension as a fact within their

¹ St. Luke xxiv. 51.

⁴ St. John xx. 17.

² Acts i. 9-11.

⁵ Ephesians iv. 10.

³ St. John vi. 62.

⁶ 1 Tim. iii. 16.

own knowledge; it was used by them in their writings as one of the facts well known and authenticated; and it is referred to as an accomplished fact, in the book of Revelation; for St. John saw the Son of man actually in Heaven. This doctrine of the ascension is also stated in the creeds of the early church, and it has been accepted as one of the great facts in regard to the risen Lord by the Christian church in every age.

IV.

In connection with the ascension, *we are reminded of the cloud which “received Him out of their sight.”* The ascension to Heaven changed very much the relations of the disciples to their Lord and Master. We should expect such a change from the words of Christ before He was put to death. “Whither I go,” He said to His disciples, “ye cannot come.”¹ In bringing immortality to light, it was not His purpose to disclose all the mysteries of the world to come.

The disciples had been very familiar with Him. They had been able to go to Him with all their perplexities. They had been instructed by His wisdom, and comforted by His gracious words. When He was laid in the tomb there was an interruption of their communion, but it was only for a few hours. He came back to them, and talked with them in the old way, at intervals, for six weeks. He was giving them His blessing when He was taken up into Heaven. But that was His last word. They saw Him begin the ascension, and then, as they were looking, the

¹ St. John viii. 21.

cloud was interposed. They did not see Him finish the ascension.

One might have thought that, in giving the final proof of immortality, He would have made some new disclosure of the other world. But He did not make it. No message came from Him to assure them of His arrival. The cloud concealed Him from their sight. His words of blessing, before He was taken up, were the last words they would hear from Him while they remained in this world. How often, in the years of labor and of persecution, the disciples must have longed to see, though but for an hour, their vanished Lord. But He never came back to them. No word from His lips reached their ears. It was, indeed, granted to St. John, when he was in "the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus," to see "a door opened in Heaven,"¹ and to hear the songs of the redeemed. But that was only in a vision. It was as if he had dreamed of seeing his Lord, rather than as if he had actually seen Him after the old manner.

St. Paul, also, was caught up into Paradise, "whether in the body, or out of the body," we do not know; and he "heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter."² So that no knowledge has come to us from beyond the cloud in consequence of his experiences. At some other times, some of the Apostles had communications from Heaven, but they related to some matters of practical service, and gave no information in respect to the secrets of the spiritual world. We also enjoy the privilege of

¹ Revelation i. 9, iv. 1.

² 2 Corinthians xii. 1-4.

prayer, and of communion with God, and much of the joy of our life depends upon this communion.

But, after all, the mysterious wall of death cuts us off from direct and personal knowledge of the spiritual world. Up to that wall, one has said, we are every one of us moving. Through a narrow door our friends, one by one, are passing, — and the door closes instantly, so that we have not a single word after they cross its portals.¹ We catch the last word, the last whisper, the last sigh, of the earthly life, and then there is silence unbroken through all the years that remain. It may be the nearest friend on earth that passes through the door, the one who shared all our thoughts and all our affections. We go on together up to the last moment of conscious life, and then the curtain falls. We are on this side, and the spirit is on the other side; and no prayers can bring to us even a word from the departed. We linger close up to the separating wall, and long with unspeakable desire for some message from the vanished spirit, some knowledge of its experiences; but it is in vain. No one comes back through the closed door. If we have neglected to speak any word of sympathy, or of appreciation, any farewell word, it is too late to speak it now. The dull, cold ear of death cannot hear, and the spirit has passed beyond the cloud.

There are some who tell us that *they cannot believe in immortality unless they can have some communication from their departed friends.* These reject all the

¹ Sermons by Phillips Brooks, p. 216.

evidence for another life unless that evidence can be confirmed by their senses. But the evidence from the teaching of Christ concerning the spiritual world appeals to our *faith*. No man hath seen God at any time, yet we believe in Him. Jesus did not tell us that we should have a vision of angels, or that the door would be opened, and that our friends would come and go through the open door. All His teaching seems to show that there are two worlds: the world in which He was while He dwelt among men, and the other world into which He passed when the cloud received Him out of the sight of His disciples. When we have done with the discipline which He appoints for us in this world, He will come for us, and will receive us into the place which He has prepared for us.

There have been any number of superstitions with respect to omens, and dreams, and signs, given by some ghostly power. It has taken centuries for men to outgrow the superstitions connected with witchcraft. That part of our nature which fits us for religion may be led very easily to sympathize with such notions as these. The step from faith to superstition has always been an easy step for men to take. Our elder poets have used these notions with singular skill and power. But the day has gone by when sensible Christians expect their departed friends to appear to them, like the ghost in Hamlet. The light of true religion is dissipating the crude notions concerning omens, and dreams, and witches, and ghosts. Christians have learned that the best consolations come from other sources than these.

V.

And yet, *the Christian doctrine of immortality teaches that there are very close connections between the other world and this.* God rules in both worlds, and He governs this world with a benevolent purpose to prepare us for Heaven. The law of sympathy is the law of the universe, for God is love. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."¹ It is safe to infer that the angels have some communications from this world. We read, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, of the "great cloud of witnesses" who compass us about.² It seems to be the object of that passage to draw a motive for Christian fidelity from the assurance that those in Heaven are watching our progress. These texts seem to teach that there is some real connection between the two worlds. But it is not safe to infer that those in Heaven know everything that goes on among men. They are not omniscient. No one of them can be in two places at the same time. They cannot know all about all their friends, and still enter into all the employments of Heaven. There must be some limitations to the knowledge which our friends in Heaven can have of our lives. The separating wall cuts off very much that our fancy would incline us to expect.

Sometimes we are told that the spirits of the departed are present with us, though unseen, and that they accompany us as guardian angels, and are often able to protect us from harm, and to hold us back from

¹ St. Luke xv. 10.

² Hebrews xii. 1.

wrong-doing. One should speak with reserve with respect to such a theory, for we know too little of the other life to qualify us to speak confidently. Protestant Christians will not be inclined to accept the Romish doctrine of the invocation of saints, and angels, or of the Virgin Mary. The Lord has not taught us to look for protection to any one in Heaven but to Himself.

We should bear in mind that we are not the only objects of interest to our friends in Heaven. When the Lord takes them away it is because they have finished their work in this world. If the other world is as attractive as our Saviour represents it to be, these friends must enter at once upon a larger and more spiritual existence. They will be attracted at once towards the Redeemer Himself, who is the light and the glory of that world.

There are also many dear friends who have gone from earth before them, whom they will be especially anxious to see. They will enter with them into the employments of the world of light and of praise. It is not reasonable to expect that they will make it their only purpose to watch over the friends they have left in this world. They certainly will not forget them; but it is not certain that they are able to do anything for their help and consolation. There is not a word in the New Testament which encourages us to invoke their aid. Nor should we derive much satisfaction from knowing that the spirit of a dear friend had left the associations of Heaven, in order to follow our poor earthly life, while it was unable to help us, or to speak to us a single word. The mere presence of a spirit, with which one could hold no

converse, which one could not even see or touch,—the simple presence, without sight, or words, or signs of recognition,—would it not be an aggravation of our sorrow, rather than a relief?

God might have revealed a great deal more concerning the world to come, and it is reasonable to believe that His reserve is due to the fact that too much knowledge would unfit us for the duties of the present. He is training us, in this life, for the spiritual world. We are in the school of Christ. He does not want us to become dissatisfied with our school, and to be longing to escape from our discipline.

Besides, the friends who have left us have finished their discipline. Some of them have passed through the furnace of affliction. They have shown the perfect work of patience and faith that is an anchor to the soul. They do not need to turn back to the school. God has something new for us in each change in our experience. It is not His way to tell us beforehand the things He has in reserve for us. He will not make Heaven so common that its pleasures will be cheap. “There *remaineth* a rest for the people of God.” We should be thankful that “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for those that love Him.”²

I. WE MAY BE VERY SURE, THEREFORE, FROM THE TEACHINGS OF OUR LORD, THAT THERE IS ANOTHER LIFE. The doctrine of immortality underlies all His greatest and most serious words. It is

² 1 Cor. ii. 9. [a. v.]

presupposed in His own pre-existence, and in His resurrection and ascension. It is fundamental in the Christian Faith.

2. We shall do well, however, to accept the fact that *there is a separation* between the earthly and the heavenly life. We cannot see beyond the cloud. Death effects a separation that is real and lasting. Our Christian friends have done for us all that it is permitted them to do. They have had the "last of earth," and have been advanced to a higher stage of existence. They have passed, each one alone, through the door that opens into the hereafter. Faith enables us to leave them confidently to the loving care of the Saviour. He will do for them all that they need. As surely as this Easter morning has dawned upon us, so surely does the light of Heaven dawn upon them.

3. *We know less than we desire of their employments.* We cannot know, certainly, how their minds will work. They will look forward as well as backward. God has some better things for them than they knew in the earthly life. Yet it is not the teaching of the Bible that they will forget those they have loved in this world, any more than we shall forget them. It is probable that they will know something of the things that befall us, though we can know absolutely nothing of the things that befall them. This intelligence may pass from earth to Heaven. It does not pass, so far as we know, from Heaven to earth.

4. Is it right for us *to pray for those who have gone from earth?* Most Protestants would say no. The

Romanists have carried the practice of praying for the dead to such an extent that it has fallen under the condemnation of those who believe, as we do, that the limit of probation is passed before one leaves this world. And yet, there does not seem to be any good reason why we should cease praying for a dear friend who has gone to Heaven, when we have been praying for that friend every day for almost all our lives. Prayer is our highest privilege. We love to pray for our dearest kindred. We follow them with our prayers, even to the gates of death. Why may we not be permitted to commend them still to their Father and to our Father, to their God and to our God? I do not see that it is forbidden in the New Testament. I find traces of such a practice in some parts of the history of the church. It is true, the Saviour will, for His own love, watch over them, without our prayers. But we pray for the living who are the beloved of the Lord. Why must we cease to pray for these same loved and unforgotten children of God, when they have passed beyond our sight?

5. Last of all: it is our privilege to look forward with confidence to meeting those Christian friends whom God has taken from us. The cloud has received them out of our sight, and there must be years of silence, and patient waiting. But, by and by, we also shall pass beyond the cloud, and, on the other side, the mysteries of the spiritual world will be revealed. We shall meet the friends of long ago, and shall enter with them into the joy of our Lord.

How strong and tender the motive to live worthy

of them; to do nothing, in the years that remain, that will unfit us for a closer companionship with them. In order that we may live worthy of them, we need to cultivate the knowledge we have of the unseen world, and to set our affection on things above. The Christian world of our time needs, as never before, the strength and steadiness that come from a familiar acquaintance with the truths that relate to immortality. We should accustom ourselves to send our thoughts forward to the home we expect to reach at the end of life's journey. We should be diligent to finish the work which our Lord has given us to do.

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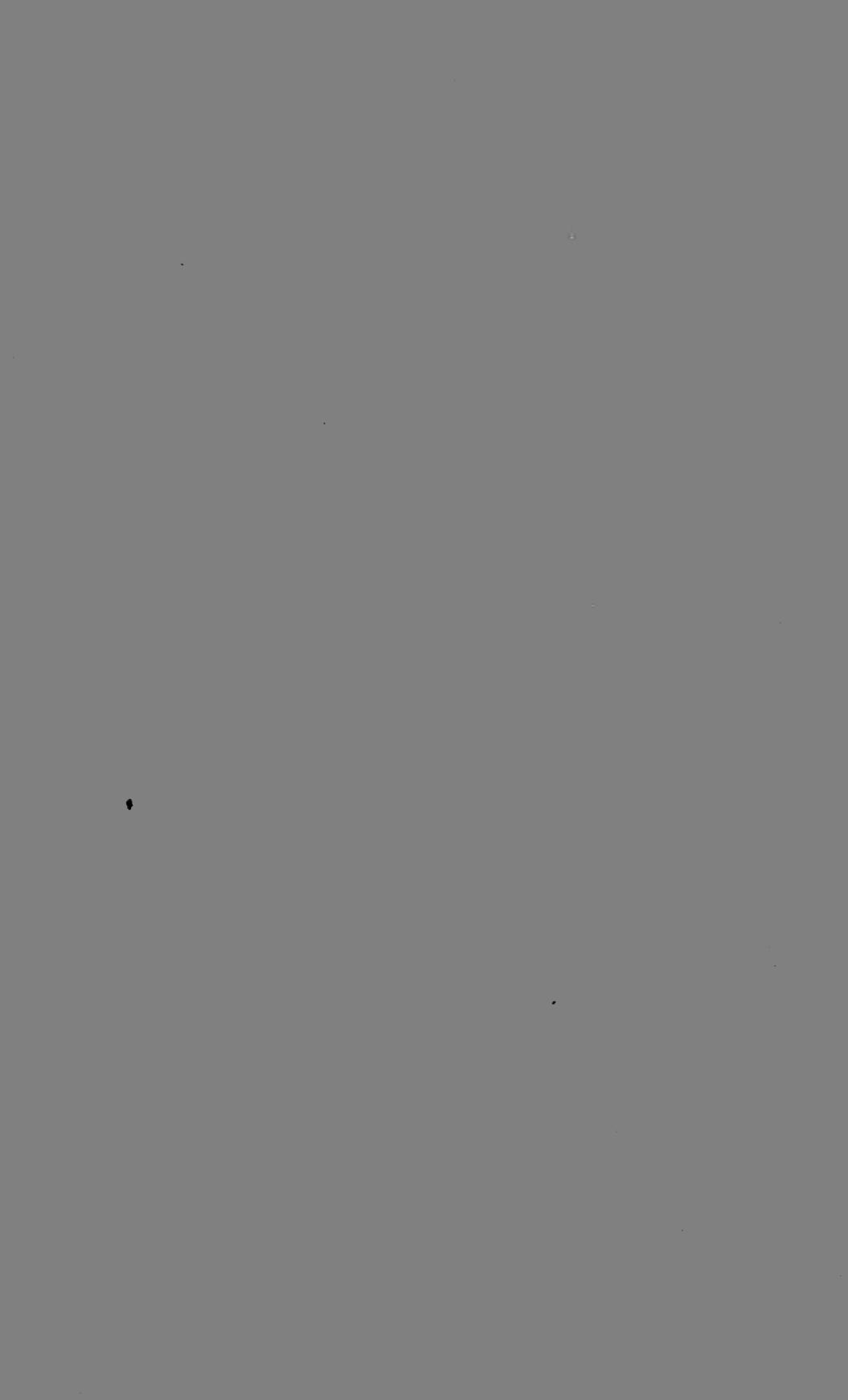
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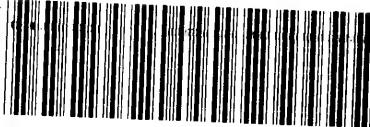
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